

STAR WEEKLY NOVEL

ARMS FOR
ADONIS

by CHARLOTTE JAY

How did Sarah get mixed in this
strange plot? Well, first, there
was the handsome stranger...

PART 1

SARAH awoke, and lying under a sheet only
—for it was already hot—sampled the flavor
of that Lebanese April morning.

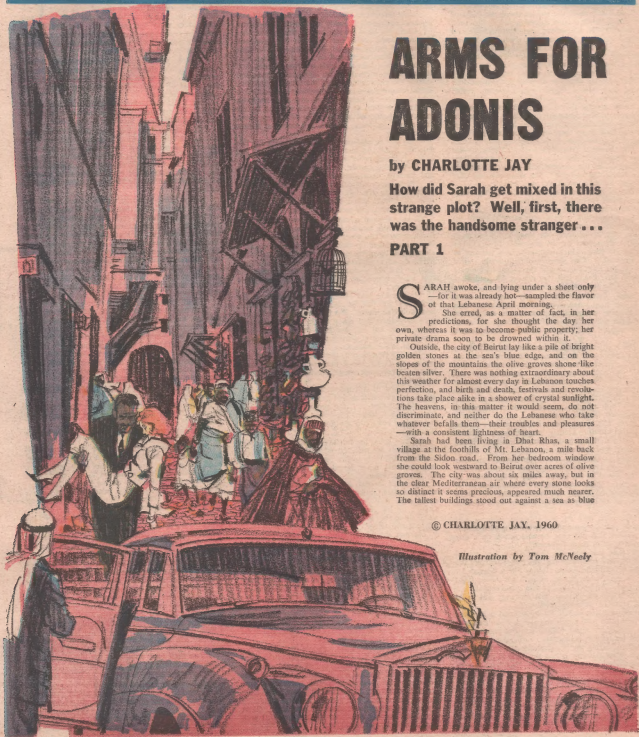
She erred, as a matter of fact, in her
predictions, for she thought the day her
own, whereas it was to become public property; her
private drama soon to be drowned within it.

Outside, the city of Beirut lay like a pile of bright
golden stones at the sea's blue edge, and on the
slopes of the mountains the olive groves shone like
beaten silver. There was nothing extraordinary about
this weather for almost every day in Lebanon touches
perfection, and birth and death, festivals and revolutions
take place alike in a shower of crystal sunlight.
The heavens, in this matter it would seem, do not
discriminate, and neither do the Lebanese who take
whatever befalls them—their troubles and pleasures
—with a consistent lightness of heart.

Sarah had been living in Dhat Rhas, a small
village at the foothills of Mt. Lebanon, a mile back
from the Sidon road. From her bedroom window
she could look westward to Beirut over acres of olive
groves. The city was about six miles away, but in
the clear Mediterranean air where every stone looks
so distinct it seems precious, appeared much nearer.
The tallest buildings stood out against a sea as blue

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Illustration by Tom McNeely



as the wild iris that a month ago had bloomed on the stony hills. Even in the short time she had been in Lebanon, Sarah could notice the difference there in an alteration in the skyline, for with American aid and Saudi Arabians pouring money into the place, hotels and blocks of flats were shooting up under one's eyes.

Sarah that morning went through the contents of her handbag; her passport, her wallet and 30 pounds sterling in travellers' cheques—all the money she possessed in the world—and arranged to have her suitcase picked up later.

It was 9.30 when she walked down the flight of stone steps that led from the house on to the road below. Old Dr. Chahine, who with his wife and married daughter lived on the ground floor, was pottering about among his rose bushes—a tall, bony figure in pyjamas and slippers—for like most of the men of Dhat Rhas he not only kept but spent a good many of his waking hours in this attire.

His daughter, who was standing at the front door buying fruit from a farmer with a donkey, called out a greeting to Sarah as she passed.

As she crossed the road and continued down the steps toward the centre of the village she thought of them with affection, and a touch of regret. She knew so little about them—an opportunity had been missed, now it was too late.

The charm of Dhat Rhas—of all Lebanon—for Dhat Rhas might have been any Lebanese village perched up on the terraced hills—pressed painfully upon Sarah that morning. She was conscious of a nostalgic ache for what she was leaving.

The stairway led into the centre of the village where three roads met by a row of old houses, now accommodating a cafe and a shop. This was a busy corner and a dangerous one, cluttered up by a pile of stones that had been lying spilled out on the edge of the road ever since Sarah had been in Dhat Rhas, and by the posters of a donkey and a dromedary which were invariably tethered to the steps of a grain shop veranda; people waited here for the Beirut buses and the clients of the cafe sat by their chairs half way out on the road playing cards and smoking their hookahs.

Sarah, however, had barely stepped down on to the road when a taxi filled with dark faces and flapping white keffiyehs shot into the narrow road from the upper part of the village. To avoid it, she stepped back into the gutter by the butcher's shop.

The taxi whirled on, just missed the dirty sheep on the corner and disappeared, its horn blaring in a roar. Sarah glared after it and muttered, "You fool!" ineffectually, in English. Someone else was cursing it in Arabic and she turned to see the butcher making gestures of an unfriendly nature with a blood-stained chopper. The freshly killed carcass of a cow dripped from a big steel hook on the shop's ceiling. She recoiled from it in distaste.

There had been water in the gutter . . . she could feel moisture seeping into her sandals. But it was not water! The gutter ran with blood. Sarah shuddered and felt sick.

And yet—strangely—those fierce-eyed men, their white cotton keffiyehs framing their swarthy faces—muttered in the gutter—only added to her fear and her regret. They were part of a picture and of an atmosphere of which the sunlight, the old stone faces and the early summer flowers were another aspect.

Take part, take all, she thought, with an odd sense of exhilaration and a tolerance toward Beirut taxi drivers that can only be entertained on a day of purging from them for ever.

My last bus ride, she thought, as they rattled down the Rue de Damas past the racetrack and the groves of umbrella pines. It was like a pilgrimage. The thought, once having entered her head, fixed her mind. And on that her fate was sealed.

The Place du Cannon, that morning, was in its usual state of animated confusion.

Around lawns picked out by battered palm trees and shaded with ponds and flower beds, cars and taxis honked, swooped, backed into one another and rushed for hapless pedestrians.

Sarah, leaving the bus terminus and entering the square from the top where the little dirty yellow taxis roared and along the Rue de Damas, felt as though part of her life were rushing on past her and leaving her stranded.

She walked past the coffee shops and confectioneries, their huge shallow trays of ashtray sweets, her head filled with sober thoughts of the future. She was not going to change her mind about breaking her engagement to Marcel, but the pros-

pect of returning to London more or less penniless was not enticing, and she walked slowly, still though hoping that something might happen to hold her back.

Beirut had suited her, had offered opportunities to her easy nature. Her spirit had thrived in its exotic atmosphere as her body had thrived in its hot summer sunshine. It seemed to her to have struck a happy compromise; it was chaotic, but lusty and dynamic; order never made for rigidity or dullness, and confusion stopped just short of anarchy.

Sarah thought of London, and in no mood to do it just could visualize only fog and taxation forms. Turning the corner, she saw the sky burned blue, her shadow moved beside her, inky on the pavement. She walked on, passing tall Ethiopians with shining, cloth-black faces who stood on street corners selling roses. Lebanese girls wearing French and Italian clothes tripped past on high-heeled shoes, and outside the cafe at the top of the square, handsome sheikhs in amber robes and snow-white tasselled keffiyehs staid at the passing crowd over their hookahs.

At the bottom of the Place she stopped by the money changers and with a wallet of sterling notes, dollars and Lebanese pounds, felt one step nearer to her future.

Now, at a seat on the plane, the cold English summer, a job and bus queues . . . No one queued here. Personal pride would not permit it. Turning the corner, Sarah came to Bab Edris and made a dash across the road.

The airway companies had their offices up a wide street to the left, but Sarah, enticed by the scent of freshly baked bread, roses and Damascus apricots, turned and entered the Suk.

It was a small market, a narrow lane between tall houses with smaller side lanes leading off it, but Sarah knew of no place that gave her such a feeling of freedom and release, such a sense of nature's abundance. Looking around at the flower stalls, the pyramids of vegetables and fruit, one would have thought that the seasons had been defied, that one had stepped into an extravaganza of the year's productivity.

Strawberries and black cherries proclaimed the spring and the first Bikhfaya peaches, hard but red, nestled in vine leaves. The flower stalls were banked with roses and roses, at the end of the line where it led out into the next street, an old man standing in front of an enormous pink car held out posies of red anemones.

His hand had been to the bucket at his feet and taking out a posy, shook the water from the flower stems. "Coquelicot rouge, madame . . . cinquante piastres."

The blood of Adonis, thought Sarah, remembering St. Joseph's church that was like a pagan temple. Coquelicot rouge . . . the symbol of a dying god whose wounds stained the hillsides in spring. And the strange beauty of the ancient land touched her heart, like pain.

I'll buy some for Nadea—though Nadea, who looked upon the past, except that part of it which had been favorable to her people, as a humiliation, could probably never hear of Adonis and would much prefer roses.

She went on to open her bag, but halted. A man who had been walking down the Suk—a typical Arab with dark eyes, a black moustache, and stubble on his chin—had drawn near and seemed suddenly to fix his eyes on her with a look of astonishment and terror.

At that second the bomb went off.

CHAPTER II

THE noise was deafening. A moment of silence and stillness followed upon it and then, as though at a signal, people started shouting and screaming. Sarah was unbent, but the noise of the explosion had been like a blow—she felt shattered and powerless; and although the bomb had evidently gone off directly behind her, she stood transfixed, staring into the Suk.

Panic had broken loose. People rushed past her yelling. All over the Suk could be heard the rasping sound of shutters being pulled down. Buckets crashed to the ground and the white fleshy blooms of arum lilies scattered on the pavement were crushed underfoot; new potatoes poured out from an overturned sack, and a child, running screaming into a shop, slipped and stumbled over them. Then somebody running out from the Suk collided with Sarah and sent her sprawling.

She flung out her hands as she fell and knocked over the bucket of red anemones. The crowd who was crouching on the ground in terror, crawled toward her, shaking his fist. His face with its dirty seamed cheeks and violent eyes was thrust close to her own. He seemed to be shouting.

Suddenly she felt herself being lifted up and hauled away. The scent of carnations and burned explosives gave way to that of hair oil and Turkish tobacco. She felt too confused to look up at the man who had taken hold of her and some strange attraction attached her to the chaotic scene in the Suk so that she hung back in his arms and was dragged to a car and pushed in. Yet she offered no active resistance. She was so weak, so weary from the Suk and the suspected, vaguely, that someone was chivalrously rescuing her.

The car started up she leaned out of the window for a last glimpse. The old man was crawling on his knees in what looked to be a pool of blood. But it was not blood—only broken anemones.

But I did see blood, thought Sarah confusedly, it's all over my shoe . . . the butcher's shop with the slaughtered beef bleeding in the gutter.

Then the car shot off from the pavement and before she had time to collect her wits they were careening down toward the Avenue des Français. The shops, the pavement fled by. People were running, police whistles blowing and a confused shouting, audible in the short intervals when the man beside her stopped blaring his horn, sounded from the distance.

Every Beirut motorist drives at full speed, but this was the first time that Sarah had been in a car with someone who was seriously in a hurry. It was like flying. The car, moreover, was the largest she had ever driven in. It seemed as wide as the road. The pale pink bonnet loomed away ahead and silver fin-like structures sticking out at the back gave it an appearance that was both futuristic and predatory. Inside it was upholstered in plush and had every possible gadget, including a telephone. Oil—thought Sarah, and looked around for her hand bag. But it had gone.

"Stop!" she cried. "Stop! Put me down!"

The man beside her took no notice but sat with set lips, his eyes fixed keenly on the road ahead. He was young—though there was a little gray in his black hair—and he had a handsome face. He held the wheel with one brown hand and with the other an enormous sapphire ring—the other, in the manner of Beirut drivers who disdain to keep both hands on the wheel, the other dangled out of the window. Yet he was tense—there was sweat on his brow.

"Arretez! Arretez!" cried Sarah. "Faites-moi descendre!"

"What is the matter with you?" he replied in French. "I am not abusing you. I am saving your life."

"My handbag . . . I dropped it! It's back here in the Suk!"

"I can't be helped," said her benefactor indifferently, and swerved to avoid a taxi. He had slackened his pace a little and every now and again, Sarah noticed, his eyes shifted to the rear vision screen as though he were on the lookout for something behind him. Amber beads decorated the windscreen. A Moslem, thought Sarah viciously. High-handed with women.

"Who are you to say it can't be helped?" she cried. "We're not all Saudis with slaves and oil wells. Do you realize you've paid more for this ridiculous car than most people have to live on for years. Put me down immediately!"

"I am Syrian," said her rescuer haughtily, his voice expressive of all the contempt that one Arab feels for another. "Every man in the Middle East is proud to be what he is; to suggest that he might be anything else is to insult him with an implication of the second rate. I have saved your life," he repeated. "Is it for this you insult me? If you had good manners you would thank me for what I have done."

"My life was not in danger, and if it were, I could look after it myself. I am not a big girl."

"You shall have another if the loss of so insignificant an article so troubles you."

"Damn the bag! I had my passport in it and my air ticket to London and all the money I have in the world!" she cried. "Right! Right!" he replied, forcing. "Put me down!" she cried.

But the man beside her paid no heed. They drove recklessly on. News of the explosion had

might stop and think about them occasionally instead of ranting on all the time about your own imagined grievances.

"Enough! You will not curse my honor!" he shouted so loudly that the cat woke up. Sarah, who did not care for public scenes, looked about her nervously, but the young couple and the man in the red fez who was native to Beirut did not even bother to raise their eyes.

The young shopkeeper had discreetly faded off, leaving the chosen handbag behind him.

"Please don't shout at me," she said coldly. "I have no intention of taking the handbag. What's more, I am not going now."

The man's mad, she thought. His hands were trembling. A band of gray pallor outlined his beautiful mouth. She could hear his heavy breathing. She pushed back her chair but his hand shot out and gripped her wrist. "You will not go," he whispered.

"Let me go!" she cried, and a little shiver of fear went through her.

To her surprise the fingers gripping her wrist relaxed a little. He leaned forward over the table and said in a low, imploring voice: "Lady, please stay with me." His dark eyes were soft with supplication. He's not angry, she thought with astonishment. He's afraid. . . . Slowly she nodded.

"I have lied to you," he said quietly. "I am humbling myself to admit it. It is for this reason that I ask you to take this handbag—I have been the cause of grave loss to you—I did not know it at the time but now I understand and I must pay you back. Who knows what great debt I owe to you? And tomorrow my debt may be greater. . . . If you were an Arab it would not matter. But we are all brothers, we share each other's grief. But you are a stranger and perhaps in your heart you despise me. I believe you have a kind heart and you speak like an Arab, with courage. I respect you. For that reason I know I can tell you that I lied to you."

"Well, that's all right," said Sarah, getting up and handing her hand. "I'll take the handbag and it will please you. I don't understand what you're talking about, but if you think it's important. . . ."

"Miss, will you please rise to your feet and walk across the street, and leave me into the street."

The request came so abruptly she sat staring for a moment before obeying.

"Please. . . ."

She got up; making her way through the tables, she went to the open lattices on the edge of the terrace and looked down. Washing flapped about on the flat roofs. There were few people about; the pink car was parked where they had left it in front of the restaurant, and one of the waiters evidently standing guard over it, leaned against the front mud-guard; an itinerant vendor selling green almonds and apricots trundled his barrow along the center of the road. Some 50 yards farther down stood a green car—a taxi, with a photograph of Col. Nasser on the windscreen.

Sarah turned and walked back to the table. "All I can see is a taxi—a green car."

"They have followed me."

For a moment she, too, had thought this, but the suspicion, put into words, seemed too far-fetched to be taken seriously. "Why on earth would they do that?"

Drawing himself up with a look of pride, he said: "Would it surprise you if I were to tell you that the bomb in the Suk was for me?"

"For you? Yes, it would surprise me greatly."

Obviously the man was a misanthrope—some peopled eldest son, or perhaps a Syrian army officer on leave. How pleased he was at the thought of being a target for somebody's bomb!

Nobody in the Middle East, according to Sarah's view, was quite sane. Murderers . . . assassins . . . criminals . . . Calm and Damascus . . . the epithets with such pitiless monotony on the most innocent of occasions, it was no wonder people's nerves were on edge. Sarah, quick to appreciate the reason for scepticism, had grown accustomed to alarms and was inclined to shrug them off.

"I told you that I had saved your life," said the Syrian. "It is not true . . . you have saved mine. I chose you as my guardian. You think that is strange. . . . Calm and Damascus . . . I feel ashamed to think that I have implicated the Western powers in Arab affairs. Excuse me, I am speaking in English now and I do not express myself well. I saw you there and in a flash it came to me. I have forced you into my service unwillingly. While

you are with me they will make no fresh attack upon me—they will not want an Englishwoman implicated in their criminal acts. The last thing they want is to give others an excuse to interfere. . . . and alas! I have played an old game—we have played it here for centuries—I have sought my safety behind the shield of one who is stronger than either myself or my enemies. I am ashamed, but I had no choice. If I had not done this they would have killed me. It is for this reason that I ask you to stay with me for a little while longer. Perhaps my word you will not suffer any loss for what has happened to you. You will not have to return to this man, your fiancé. You need not even flee back to England to escape his treatment. If you will only stay with me a little longer. . . ."

Well, that was rather bright of him to guess about Marcel, thought Sarah. What an extraordinary man! Was this a new approach? No, it was more likely that he believed that he was saying. Perhaps he had had a quarrel with a rival chick—some sandhill dispute that had followed him to Beirut. For in spite of the pink car, the gold fountain pen and manicured hands (or was it because of them?) he seemed to have stepped out of medieval times. This man, thought Sarah, wore his suit in some indefinable way like a burnous and handled his car as though it were a horse.

"How long do you want me to stay with you?" she asked.

He had expected him to say: "Till next Monday," or "Till the end of the month," and was a little dashed when he instantly replied: "Till 12 o'clock."

"She looked at her watch. It was 11.30. "But why 12?"

"Because then I have an appointment."

"I see," she said vaguely. "Well, I don't mind." And lapsed into silence.

The noise of Beirut—the rush of traffic and honking of horns came up muffled from the streets outside. But in the cafe it was quiet and peaceful.

The Syrian had taken pen and paper and was bending over the table, writing quickly. For some time the only sounds were the scratch of his pen and the low murmur of the young couple in the corner. The moments ticked by.

Sarah became conscious, suddenly, of a feeling of unreality. What have I got myself into? she thought. Who is this man? She looked up to find him looking at her. He had finished writing and held two letters in sealed envelopes in his hand.

"Sarah," he said. "This is a Moslem name. Sarah was Abraham's wife."

Sarah defended defensively. Not because there was any implication in his manner but because his dark, steady regard made her heart beat more quickly.

"It's a Jewish name, too," she said. "Abraham was a Jew."

The retort, once made, struck her as outrageously foolhardy. He'll murder me, she thought. But the look of anger passed from his face; suddenly he smiled. "Jesus was a Jew, too."

"Sarah smiled back. 'Yes, but I don't mind.'"

"That's true," the English are cold-blooded. You don't mind anything."

"That's ridiculous. We just don't waste our passions. We make sure that the things we mind are worth our notice. A fine one I am to talk. . . . she thought."

That's true, too. We do not always know the difference between important and unimportant things. I have been to Europe—it is easier there. Your history has sorted these things out for you. You think you are wiser than we are, but it is your father who is wiser, not you. You simply enjoy your inheritance. But we must start further back. It is asked of my generation to gallop through history. You laugh at us. . . ."

"It is true—you laugh! We are not fools—we know. Yet it is we who should laugh. We have covered more ground than you."

"You are right. We have not had time and space and distance, is it? That's why you drive such a big car."

He scowled at her. "Yes, for as it is speed and distance—we have lagged behind long enough. Now will you please see if the taxi is still there?"

Ordering me around again, thought Sarah as she rose to go. She went to the front door and looked down into the street. When she returned to the table he was slipping the gold pen back into his pocket. There was, she remarked, a close, almost furtive look on his face.

"I knew you were alarmed for nothing. It's gone."

"Then let us go, too."

He was not, he told her, going to drop her off at Rue Jeanne d'Arc, but at the place where he himself was going for his appointment at 12. He apologized for this discourtesy, but it would be more prudent, he explained, for her to stay with him for as long as possible. In any case, she would not be greatly inconvenienced for Rue Jeanne d'Arc was only a few streets away.

They drove along the tramline past the American university and turned toward Rue El Hamra. They passed some fruit stalls and a travel agency, and turned into Rue Zahle.

It was a short, one-way street connecting two larger, busier roads. Down these the traffic rushed with its usual abandon, but Rue Zahle was empty and quiet. The street contained one tall, narrow block of flats in the process of being built, a few small shops, and some large houses set back in gardens. Outside one of these the car came to a halt. Through an iron gateway set in the stone wall, Sarah could see pomegranates and loquat trees.

There were few people about, for it was getting toward the hottest part of the day. Some children were playing in the rubble by the new block of flats. There were no other cars in the street.

"Is this where you meet your friend?" asked Sarah, as the Syrian opened the door for her. She could not have said why but she felt suddenly depressed and let down, as though the day had dwindled into an anti-climax.

"My friend?" He seemed to savor the word with a bitter irony. "Yes, my friend and colleague."

"Another Syrian?"

"You must go now." He spoke impatiently and his eyes flickered watchfully up and down the street, never ceasing to rest on the car.

"Well, good-by." She held out her hand. It was several seconds before he even noticed it. A car, ignoring the one-way traffic sign, entered the street from the other end and he looked at this and not into Sarah's face.

"Good-by."

There was nothing else to do but go. She drew her hand out of his with a queer sense of hurt and turned away. All day long she would be saying: "Do not go. He wasn't even going to make an attempt to see her again. . . . Not that she wanted to see him again—a flashy Syrian with padded shoulders. . . . But one didn't have to feel too unattractive. Perhaps he's looking at me now, she thought—sorry to have let me go without saying something. Shall I glance back and see? And will an arrogant Syrian see I'm interested. . . . Well, why not?"

She looked back and saw him turn and stagger, as the man in the car opened fire.

Bullets splattered along the wall and the pavement. Little puffs of white dust spouted up only a few yards from Sarah's feet. The Syrian made a lurch toward the open gateway. The gun chattered again—he halted and flung out his arms. He seemed to hang, poised, in a wonderfully graceful attitude, and then slipped gently to his knees. Sarah had time to glimpse the muzzle of the gun—drawn back from the taxi window—a man's swarthy face. She turned and ran back.

He was kneeling on the pavement, both hands hugged to his breast. As she crouched beside him he raised his face to her with a look of agony.

"Put your arm around me," she cried.

As he put his arm about her shoulder she saw his bloodstained hand and the splash of crimson on his shirt. For a moment she felt the weight of his body as he tried to lift himself. Then he collapsed, dragging her with him.

She could hear footsteps running along the pavement behind her. Then he opened his lips and said: "Ain Houssaine." And fainted.

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of rubble, the shopkeepers, the fat man behind the leban bawls had disappeared.

They had reached the end of Rue Kazé; opposite, across the road, was a travel agency—posters and photographs in its windows. A young woman with short curly black hair and a pretty, vacant, doll-like face ran out to meet them. Taking Sarah's other arm, she helped her to lead her into the office and sit her down in an armchair.

Then someone called out authoritatively in French: "Get back, please. Please get out of here. You may be hurt." There was a confused muttering and shuffle of feet. "I'm sorry, sir, you'd better come back tomorrow. Georgette—please shut the door."

Sarah heard the door slam. The man who had brought her there, the girl with the curly hair, alone remained. The man came toward her—a sunburned face with earnest gray eyes leaped over her. She stared up at him stupidly. "What is Alin Housaine?" she said.

He did not reply, but looked puzzled and sympathetic.

"What does it mean?"

"It doesn't mean anything. It's a place."

A place? Of course. But what place? Somewhere she had heard of it. Marcel . . . she connected the name with Marcel. But what could it have to do with him? She tried to think. She looked around her vacantly at the photographs on the walls. . . . Baalbeck, with its famous six columns, the high spales of Mt. Hermon, the palace at Beirut, the source of the Adonis river in a wild gorge by the sacred grove of Aphrodite. . . .

Red anemones—coquilleux rouge—cinquante piastres . . .

"Georgette, is there any of that brandy left?" They poured her brandy and made her drink it. "Thank you," said Sarah, and began to cry. The girl called Georgette hovered over her, patting her hand. The man stood back, looking worried and grave.

"What's happening?" Sarah gasped. "Is he dead?" "I'll see." He left them. The girl went, too, and stood in the doorway talking to the fat man who smelled of garlic. Sarah, left to herself, stopped crying and began to think. She felt overcome, shaken with revulsion and anger. She wanted to stand up and cry out against something—but she did not know what. It seemed to her that his murder was only one of many—a mere incident—that already that morning three people had died. But when she tried to remember who they were, she could only think of the Syrian.

She looked through the big window and saw that all in a few moments the scene outside had changed. A siren sounded and a police car swerved around into Rue Kazé. People ran after it. Others came out of the shops opposite.

The man from the travel agency came back. "The police have come. They won't let me near him."

"Is he dead?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Some say yes—some say no. This is yours, isn't it? It was lying on the footpath." And he held out the bag that the Syrian had given her.

Georgette came back, her eyes shining with excitement. "Alain! It was King Sal'd's brother."

"Who told you that?"

She pointed at the fat man outside. "The man from the fruit stall. He saw him go past. His brother used to work as a waiter in the Palace hotel—it's always full of people. She turned to Sarah. "You saw him better. Was it King Sal'd's brother?"

"I don't know what King Sal'd's brother looks like," said Sarah, trying to stop her tongue from slithering. "Hasn't he got a lot of brothers? This man was a Syrian. . . ."

Alan looked at her keenly. "Most likely—some army squabbe. . . ."

"I expect he came here for asylum," said Georgette.

"Like that other man—Colonel something or other, who was murdered last year in Rue Sadat?" She put a hand on her arm. "See if you can get some coffee next door. Have you got a jacket?"

"Thank you, you're very kind," said Sarah mechanically as he put the coat over her shoulder. She sat, clutching the handbag on her lap and staring out into the street.

Another police car drove up alongside the pavement as the first car drove away. She wondered if they had taken the Syrian in it. She felt she should do something—but she did not know what. She felt—if not responsible—at any rate, deeply

implicated. If anything remained to be done, any protest to be made, who was there to do it or to make it if not Sarah herself?

Georgette handed her a tray cup of black coffee. She drank it quickly, swallowing a mouthful of thick sediment.

The two policemen crossed the street; the crowd that had gathered on the pavement parted to let them in through the door, and as many as could followed them in.

They were young men, and like most Lebanese policemen, dark and handsome. The elder of the two addressed Alan in French, "Is this your office?" he asked.

"Yes . . . at least I am part owner. My name's Alan but gather on the pavement started to let them in through the door, and as many as could followed them in.

He ignored Sarah and she wondered if he was deliberately directing attention away from her so as to give her time to pull herself together. The police received his information in a friendly way. Every-one shook hands, and the elder man introduced himself as Insp. Malouf.

Sarah's attention wandered. She tried to look through the doorway to see if the Syrian was still lying on the pavement, but there were too many heads in the way. The man who smelled of garlic had returned and stared at her foolishly over Insp. Malouf's shoulder. There was so much talk among the onlookers it was difficult to hear what Alan Crave was saying. Something about someone called Ismael. . . . The police seemed interested in this Ismael, but Sarah could not remember his name. But what did it all have to do with the Syrian, lying dead out there in the road? Who cared about him? And the people who shot him—were they just going to get off free? Sarah felt she could have screamed with rage and irritation.

Suddenly everyone laughed at something that had been said. My God! she thought. What a chummy they were! He was laughing about coffee next. "Is he dead?" she burst out. "Or aren't you interested?"

Everyone looked at her. Insp. Malouf frowned. "It is we who are asking questions," he said. "What is your name?"

"Sarah Smith, I'm English."

"Your passport, please."

She stared up at him, her eyes wide with guilty surprise. Until this moment she had completely forgotten about her passport. Now, fleetingly, she recalled the circumstances of its loss and a premonition touched her of impending awkwardness.

"I haven't got one."

"You must have one, miss," said the inspector in clumsy English. "You must have a passport. You cannot enter the country without a visa."

"Please send these people away," she cried angrily. "I can hardly breathe."

But no Lebanese policeman minds an audience, and though a good deal of talk burst out in response to Sarah's demand, neither officer seemed disposed to do anything.

"Miss, I have asked you for your passport," cried Insp. Malouf, over the din of Arabic. "It is not for you to give orders, please."

"I'm sorry. I can't hear you."

In the end it was Alan Crave who cleared the room and shut the door.

"Now, if the silence is to your taste," began the inspector sarcastically.

"I've told you—I haven't got a passport. I lost it today in the Suk, and my air ticket and 30 pounds."

Insp. Malouf was angry with Alan for putting the people out—he knew that he should have done this himself. Now he felt humiliated and proceeded to revenge himself upon Sarah. "An air ticket to where?" he said sternly, reverting to French language which, he perceived, gave him an advantage over her. "You think you are going away?"

"I was going to London today. I was on my way to the airways office to book my seat."

"You cannot leave."

"Oh, I know that," said Sarah sulkily.

"Excuse me, inspector. . . . Alan Crave spoke with some diffidence, and with some irritation, about your investigation, but Miss Smith has suffered a bad shock—this man was shot down under her very eyes. You can see by the way she's trembling."

"This is terror, I think."

"It's shock. There's no need to put her through all this. She was only a bystander. I saw it all through the window. She was walking along the pavement—the man was behind her, getting out of

his car. He was shot down by some men in a taxi—she only went to help him."

"But that's not true," said Sarah. "I was with him. . . . I was in the car, too."

The inspector turned angrily to Alan. "You are lying to save her!"

"He's not lying. You impute to us too much guile and craft. We are only blunt English, deficient in Oriental subtlety. He didn't see me get out of the car—but I did. I was with that man all the morning."

There was a long silence while everyone adjusted their ideas to this information. Sarah, looking from Alan Crave's gray eyes to Insp. Malouf's dark brown ones, read in both volumes of interested supposition and, for her part, annoyance, the beginning of a blush touching her cheeks.

"In that case, mademoiselle," said Insp. Malouf softly, "you will be able to tell us his name."

"I don't know who he was," she said coldly. "If you will let me explain, I was walking in the French Suk when a bomb went off. . . ."

"Another assassination perhaps. . . ."

But Sarah paid no heed to this irony. The chaotic scene in the Suk came back to her with startling clarity—the white lilies trampled underfoot, the shouting, the old man kneeling in a pool of blood. She shuddered, and said: "There was blood in the gutter."

Sarah put her hands over her face. I must be suffering from shock, she thought. How strange—I feel quite stupid. She could see the Syrian's face—looked up at her so beautifully. The blood on his shirt. But in the Suk there had not been any blood—only broken anemones. Neither had three men been killed that day—only one. Only the Syrian. Sarah looked up and saw Alan Crave looking at her with an expression of sympathy. She was glad he was there. She remembered the brandy and the coat over her shoulders—and the way he had tried to keep them from questioning her; and felt grateful to him. "If you let me tell you what happened. . . . I came down from Dhat Khaw with my ticket to book a seat on the plane. I was in the Suk when a bomb went off. I don't know whether it was killed or not. I didn't have time to see. Someone knocked me out on the pavement—I dropped my bag, or perhaps someone snatched it from me—I don't remember. Then this man who was with me—Alan Crave—came and helped me to drive away. I told him to go back because I'd dropped my bag, but he said it was dangerous—everyone was fighting."

"You must have your bag," She was clutching it in her lap.

"He bought me this one because I lost the other. There's nothing in it."

The inspector clucked his tongue admonishingly and Alan Crave looked away as though it pained him to see a pretty young woman telling such feeble lies.

"How long were you with him?"

"I don't know. About an hour and a half, I suppose."

"What were you doing?"

"Drinking coffee in a cafe," said Sarah sulkily. "And don't ask me what cafe because I did not know and I couldn't take you there either—I never look where I'm going." It seemed useless and undignified striving towards any effect of plausibility; but oddly enough, this, for a bit about the coffee, was the only part of her story that the inspector found acceptable. One drank coffee on all and every occasion; it was the most likely thing to have done. Suddenly the second policeman, who all this time had been talking on the telephone, put down the receiver and cried out: "There was a bomb thrown in the Suk. At 10.30 this morning."

Sarah looked at Sarah and smiled. She smiled back. Looks of relief appeared on the faces of Alan and Georgette. Even the inspector softened. Pulling up a chair and sitting down, he leaned toward her.

"Now, mademoiselle," he said gently. "Please tell me what happened."

So Sarah told them her story from the moment of her meeting with the Syrian. More coffee was brought and she went on and on and her husband published that she had been exposed, not only to gunfire but to high explosives as well, everyone was treating her with the utmost consideration.

Even when she was going well and this atmosphere of solicitous tenderness persisted until it was discovered that one part, at least, of her story could not be supported. The younger police officer, who had again been on the telephone, announced that

no one had reported the loss of a handgun to the police.

"But that was why we went to the cafe," said Sarah. "To ring up the police. He was talking for 10 minutes. He asked for my name and address and I wrote them down on a pad..." She broke off.

Sarah was feeling aggressively Anglo-Saxon that morning. Disaster had thrown her back, as it were, upon the shores of her own nationality, where everything, however dull, seemed dependable and safe. She felt a fleeting pity for the Lebanese, who, however happily situated and richly endowed, could not count on the blessings of an English police force.

"There must be a record somewhere, unless they did nothing," she looked up plaintively. "Can I go now? I'm very tired and I haven't had any lunch."

Yes, she was allowed to go, but she was not to leave the country she was not to leave Beirut. They wanted her address—she gave them Nadea's. Also—as she had no passport, they wanted someone to vouch for her identity.

"Nadea Raziyah can vouch for me. I've known her all my life. We went to school together."

"Who is this woman? I do not know her," said Insp. Malouf, who having failed to trace any report of the missing handgun, had become suspicious again. "You don't expect to know everyone, do you? She runs a school—she's Jordanian—she's a very keen social worker. Many important people know her. The president's wife."

"It seems to me," said Insp. Malouf, becoming quite angry, "that you know nobody but Jordanians and Syrians. These people are trouble makers. . . . Refugees from Palestine come into our country. We tell our hearts open to them, what do they do? They listen to the voices of people who would murder our leaders and plot against us. How is it that you only know Jordanians who throw bombs in the Suk? The Syrians who smuggle arms over our border and train rebels to fight us?"

Sarah could only shrug her shoulders. She watched the two policemen get into a car and drive away. Outside in Rue Zahle, the excitement had not appreciably subsided. She was not absorbed in the scene that several moments passed before she noticed how quiet it was in the office. She saw the departure of the police and she said a word. She glanced up and caught Alan Crave staring at her with an expression of strange earnestness. Quickly, and with a look of embarrassment, he turned away.

He thinks I've been lying my head off—she thought with surprise. Well, I don't care. Let him think what he wants to. But she felt oddly forlorn and eager to get to Nadea, who would believe anything that friendship and loyalty demanded.

She got up and said in a formal voice: "I must go now. Thank you . . . you've been very kind."

"I'll take you," said Alan. "My car's just outside."

He likes me, thought Sarah, as he opened the door for her—but he's not going to do anything about it. Why? But the question had but fleeting interest for her. She turned to say goodbye to Georgette, but the telephone was ringing and Georgette had gone to answer it.

In silence they walked down the pavement to the car—a large crowd vehicle, with Anglo-Lebanese Travels Ltd. inscribed on its door. They had just reached it when Georgette appeared in the doorway of the agency. "Alan! Alan!" she cried.

"No moment," said Alan, as he turned to Sarah and turned back. Georgette, in a flurry of full petticoats, ran to meet him and clutching his arm, lifted a pale, frightened face.

A few moments later he returned and got into the car beside her. "Is anything wrong?" Sarah asked.

"No, just a silly mistake."

But he looked troubled and did not speak to her again except to say goodbye when he dropped her off at Nadea's apartment.

CHAPTER III

SARAH was an only child. When she was 12 her mother had died, and her father, who had died that time had just retired from his colonial office to take up fruit growing in Hampshire, sent her to boarding school. Here it was that she met Nadea Raziyah.

Nadea was the daughter of wealthy Jordanians; she had been a beautiful, animated, intelligent child

and Sarah had been instantly attracted to her. When she was quite small she had formed a preference for the more serious and outlandish than the more cheerful in that company of demure English schoolgirls, seemed to be all of these. The very fact of her having come from a hot, faraway land, provided an irresistible appeal for Sarah who felt she had been born in the wrong country and craved the sun—resenting its present absence as though she had been deprived of a birthright. She listened to Nadea's descriptions of the burning hills of Judea and Meab and determined that one day she would visit them.

Their friendship had lasted throughout their school days and beyond. When, at the age of 18, Nadea had returned to her troubled country, they had exchanged formal vows to write to each other, to visit one another, to keep their friendship at all costs alive. And so it had turned out. They had exchanged letters—Nadea had paid a visit to England when she was 24, and two years later, scraping together the last of the money that she father had left her, Sarah had flown to Beirut where Nadea was running a kindergarten for Jordanian children. She had rented an apartment in Rue Jeanne d'Arc and it was to this place that Sarah was now returning.

Nadea lived in one of the few old Turkish houses in Rhas Beirut that had somehow escaped the current destruction—on a hillside, a beautiful, two-story building set back in a garden planted with eucalyptus, fig trees and oleanders. Like all the old houses in Beirut, it was constructed from blocks of dressed stone, an outside staircase protected by delicate wrought-iron railings led to the upper storey, where, in front of the triple-pointed window that constituted its most striking architectural feature, jutted out a veranda, supported from beneath by carved stone brackets.

Mr. and Mrs. Hanouche, who owned the house and lived on the ground floor, said that it had been built late in the 18th century by Venetian architects—a desire to do not prevent them from expressing a desire to have it pulled down and replaced by a concrete building that would compete in modernity with the blocks of flats surrounding them. Times were changing, they said—and there was no denying it.

Sarah climbed the stairway leading to the upper floor and rang the doorbell. A servant opened the door and led her into the main room, where she found herself in entertaining visitors.

The big, cool room with its three-pointed windows and tiled floor always reminded Sarah of a church. Forty years ago Mr. and Mrs. Hanouche had furnished it with low divans covered in old worn rugs of dim, rich colors, an enormous black cupboard lashed with mother-of-pearl, a Madonna in a niche, some small carved tables and two excessively sentimental pictures. These things remained, and Nadea had only added some indoor plants and an embroidered sampler.

The four people occupying the room were sitting on the divans drinking Turkish coffee and talking excitedly, but they all, as Sarah entered, fell silent and turned to look at her. Nadea darted to be.

"Sarah! I was just thinking about you—don't that strange?" I was thinking how you must meet my friends, and now you have saved me the trouble of finding you out of Dhat Rhas."

Sarah by both hands, she dragged her across to the divan.

She was a tall, strikingly handsome young woman of perfect aquiline of feature, her eyes wonderfully dark and brilliant under low straight brows that lent to her face a sullen cast when she was in a bad humor, and a touch of savagery when in high spirits. Sarah could see straight away that she was thoroughly well up about something. Her eyes flashed; a faint flush tinged her olive cheeks; her very hair, hanging in a dark cloud on her shoulders, seemed to sparkle with excitement. She talked so quickly it was almost impossible to follow her.

"Sarah, these are the Thornes . . . Nigel and Margaret . . . I knew them in London. I told you about them, didn't you remember? They were away some where . . . Now they're doing a tour of the Middle East. Margaret was simply overjoyed by Jerusalem. They were just saying they ought to go while the going's good—but they'll be all right! The Lebanese won't let anyone touch their precious tourist—can you bet your life!"

Sarah dimly aware that there was some meaning, some implication, in Nadea's excited greeting, but

too weary to bother about getting to the bottom of it, sat down.

Left with the intellectuals, she decided, looking at the Thornes and wishing that Nadea had been on her own. Nigel Thorne was tall and thin with bony wrists that stuck out from coat sleeves some inches too short for him, and a narrow nose, a face that looked at once hard and innocent. His wife was a pale, skinny little creature with blonde hair and a crumpled, worried expression.

"And this is David Green, who is travelling with them."

Ignoring the visitors, Sarah turned to her friend. "Can you put me up for a day or two? I'm filthy and destitute. I lost my money and my passport in the French Suk—someone threw a bomb . . ."

"The bomb! My God! Sarah, darling, were you there? Of course you can have my bed—I'm going to Amman tonight. I must say," said, addressing the Thornes, "we do seem to be turning things on for you—the police at Sofar—bombs in the Suk—the Egyptian ambassador murdered under our very eyes."

"Who?" cried Sarah.

"Do you mean to say you haven't heard?" Nadea was getting more and more excited. "The Egyptian ambassador has been murdered by government agents—it happened just down here in Rue Zahle, only half an hour ago. There'll be war . . . The British will come back like a shot into the canal and that'll bring the Russians back too. I'll bring the Americans. Why these people can't mind their own business and leave us alone . . ."

Everyone looked extremely grave—except Nadea, to whom the prospect of these disasters was not, apparently, entirely unpleasant.

Sarah, forgetting her weariness, leaned forward. "Nadea! Where did you hear all this?"

"It's true, I tell you!" cried Nadea, her eyes glazed with the intoxication of impending calamity. "Everyone knows it. He was shot down in Rue Zahle. The police let the murderers get away."

"For heaven's sake, Nadea," said Sarah furiously. "Don't be such a fool and calm down. Use your head—would the Lebanese be likely to shoot down the Egyptian ambassador? They're trying to live with the Egyptians—they're in a very delicate position—it's the very last thing they'd do."

"They'd say the Syrians did it!" cried Nadea excitedly. "They'd say the Syrians did it with him, too—they nearly got her. Everyone knows about it."

"Everyone . . . who's everyone?" shouted Sarah. "You're an educated woman but when it comes to this sort of thing you'll believe anything. You listen to that demented 'waddle or Dhat Cairo . . . She broke off. But for some reason it made Sarah furiously angry to hear Nadea declare that the Syrian had been the Egyptian ambassador. Everyone, it seemed, cast the Syrian in the role they wanted him to play. Why did Nadea want him to play this one? "I know a man's been killed," she said flatly. "But he wasn't even Egyptian to begin with."

"How do you know?"

Everyone was looking at her, and it was strange, but a great reluctance seized her, to admit that she had known the Syrian, and how it was that she had come to know him. I'll tell Nadea when we're alone, she thought. But perhaps she would not even do that. Perhaps she would not tell anything at all. Her queer, brief friendship with the Syrian seemed suddenly to have become very personal—she did not want people snatching it with their suppositions and doublets.

"I was going past Rue Zahle on my way here," she said. "The police were there—they don't even know who he was. There were the wildest rumors. It's just . . . it's just Beirut. And you hysterical people . . . I said it spitefully. And then to change the subject—'Have you got anything to eat—I'm famished.'"

"Of course—poor Sarah!" cried Nadea, all remorse and tenderness. "We've just finished and I didn't think to offer you anything. You poor thing—and so me—I threw a bomb at you! Some coffee . . ."

"There you go again. I didn't say that anyone threw a bomb at me. Have you absolutely no respect for my intelligence? Must you distort the very simplest statement? And no coffee—I'm picked in coffee already . . . Food."

Nadea hurried off.

A brief silence ensued. Then Margaret Thorne spoke in a low, anxious voice: "Nigel, really I do

think we should seriously consider whether it's wise to go on."

"I don't know," said Sarah angrily, for she was still annoyed with Nadea. "It's always like this. These people live in a state of permanent hysteria—they can't bear not to be fuming over their grievances. They've got more than what they've had for ages and they're having a fit over their lives."

Nigel looked at her with cold indignation. "I had no idea," said Margaret, pursuing her own thoughts. "I thought that Beirut would be different from everyone else's. It was supposed to be. The taxi drivers—even Nadea, she's so different here, so much more excitable. There's such a feeling of tension."

"You'll get used to it," Sarah told her companion placidly.

"But all in one day—a man shot down in the street, and you say there was a bomb, and we nearly got put in jail . . . and Jerusalem . . ." She shuddered. Jerusalem had terrified her—the beautiful non-colored city set in its barren hills had seemed so grim and so implacably cruel. The prison-like walls, the stark, naked hills—all the terrible tragic history of Jerusalem seemed to speak from its golden stones. Intolerance and hatred . . . intolerance and hatred.

"When were you nearly put in jail?" asked Sarah. At that moment Nadea came back into the room followed by a servant bringing lemon, honey, black olives and Arab bread. "That's what I was telling you," she cried. "They were arrested for subversive activities. Go on, tell us, Margaret—only you'll have to start again."

The Thornes had met David Green in Jerusalem. They were on their honeymoon, a fact which they did not confess to him and which indeed they were to be careful to conceal that most people took them for brother and sister. The fact of the matter was that both rather let down by marriage and were glad to have someone else with them. They had met when Nigel was at Oxford, and both looked back nostalgically to the days when they had been good companions.

But the trip itself, quite apart from their personal problems, had not come up to expectations. Margaret had not liked Jordan; the stark, empty landscape had little appeal for her, and of the people she was frankly terrified. Nigel found it rather better, but he too felt rather let down by marriage and were glad to have someone else with them. They had met when Nigel was at Oxford, and both looked back nostalgically to the days when they had been good companions.

This feeling of guilt was for him a voluptuous, indeed ecstatic experience and nowhere could it be indulged in more happily than in the Middle East, where so much that was distressing to the humanitarian mind—the refugee camps in the Jordan valley, the devastated areas of Jerusalem, even pundah, beggars and the suspicions of the Syrian customs officials—could, if one felt so inclined, be laid at the door of Jewish imperialism.

On the whole, if it hadn't been for Margaret, he would have enjoyed himself. But her uneasiness was a reproach to him; he didn't know how to deal with her.

From Jordan they went to Syria, but Damascus, a touchy, brooding and uneasy city, had troubled Margaret no less than Jerusalem. Nigel had been relieved when the day arrived for their departure for Lebanon.

They were travelling in a large hired car; the Thornes and David Green sat in the back—in front of them two Germans who spoke to no one but each other, for they understood no English but French, and a handsome and excitable Iranian journalist who kept looking for and pointing out evidence of the oppressive policies of the French. In the front seat sat the driver and a representative of the Beirut tourist company that they were to transport—a plumpish young man with a pleasant, friendly personality who had spent some years in London and spoke fluent English in the way he thought he had been spoken there.

They had been pleased to leave Damascus, and everything, to begin with, went well. They had anticipated a long, disagreeable delay at the frontier, but their guide told them there would be no trouble, and their company and the Syrian frontier police—and as he predicted, they sailed through the frontier with a minimum of fuss which put everyone in a good humor.

When they passed through the barren, waterless valleys of the anti-Lebanon and descended into the

Beka's, their spirits rose even higher.

At first the Thornes were delighted by the change from the abrupt and dramatic, though they had suddenly entered a new country. The walled mud houses of the Beka's gave way to stone farms built on the steep, terraced hillsides, and instead of camels and sheep, there were black and white goats posed in groups or standing on their hind legs pulling at thorn bushes. But as they mounted higher the mood of the landscape changed, became sad and threatening.

The guide gradually the mile cleared, at least enough for them to see a few hundred yards ahead. They turned a corner, the road flattened out in front of them, some 50 yards ahead by a large gray boulder stood a car and half a dozen policemen. One of these stepped out into the middle of the road and hailed them.

The car stopped. The guide got out and flung himself belligerently into argument with the policemen. The driver got out of the car and got into, and the discussion warmed up further. Two more policemen joined the first so that the guide and the driver were outnumbered three to two. The talk got louder, more heated, more frantic. The passengers in the car watched anxiously.

At length the guide hunched his shoulders, lifted both hands out from his body and let them fall in exasperated acquiescence. The three policemen pushed forward the back of the car and began to pull the luggage off the top.

They all decided to get out. Nigel came up and stood beside her. "Quite a drop down here," he said cheerfully. He had noticed the queer, worried look on her face.

"I hate it," she said in a low voice. "I hate it!"

Nigel felt himself becoming angry but he could see that she was in no mood to be reasonable and answered gently, flattering her with a reference to possible liberal views she had once entertained and that seemed to have been withered somewhat by the heavy Middle Eastern air. "Surely, you don't need to be told to be patient and have a little understanding."

But the trip itself, quite apart from their personal problems, had not come up to expectations. Margaret had not liked Jordan; the stark, empty landscape had little appeal for her, and of the people she was frankly terrified. Nigel found it rather better, but he too felt rather let down by marriage and were glad to have someone else with them. They had met when Nigel was at Oxford, and both looked back nostalgically to the days when they had been good companions.

Nigel and Margaret had not yet learned to quarrel casually, and it is possible, at this point that their relationship would have suffered a major setback had not a shout from the direction of the car made them turn to see what was happening.

The driver was running as though for his very life down the road towards them. They watched him in astonishment. Behind him the policemen waved and shouted. Two policemen had set out in pursuit, one drew his pistol and fired after the fugitive. But he was well ahead of them—leaping over boulders and through thorn bushes until the mist, sweeping along the hillside, swallowed him away. The policeman fired once, fatally, into the indifferent valley and then, turning back to shout at Nigel.

"You let him go—why didn't you stop him? You are his accomplice!" he yelled in bad French. And grabbing hold of Nigel's arm, hauled him back to the car.

Here, the unfortunate guide, almost weeping with terror, was already held fast by the two other police.

"What's happened?" cried Margaret, running after her captive husband. "What's happened?"

"Madam, it is a ghastly mistake! A ghastly mistake! That fellow . . . how was I to know he was no good? What can I do? My job . . . my reputation . . ."

He was clearly in a state of near collapse which did little to fortify the spirits of his passengers. The back seat of the car had been thrown over on the road and the explanation for his arrest was there for all to see—some dozen rifles and green gun.

Without more ado they were all bundled into the police car. But the Thornes were not to be so easily

The beauty of the scenery on that mountain road made little impression upon them. They remembered reports in the papers of arms smuggling into Lebanon, of attempts by Syrians and Egyptians to overthrow the Lebanese government, and of the Syrian army more susceptible to their persuasions; anyone mixed up in such activities stood the risk of being charged with subversion, for which the penalty might be anything.

They were extremely relieved when, after no more than an hour in the police station, during which time they were given coffee and treated with utmost courtesy, they were all released with apologies for the inconvenience that had been caused to them. All this, is, except the guide—who they heard no more of him.

"Poor chap," said Nigel. "You could see he had nothing to do with it—it was obviously the driver—he went for his life as soon as he saw that the game was up. But I suppose they felt they had to arrest somebody. He was rather a dear, wasn't he, Margaret?"

"Awfully nice," she said, and smiled up at him. Their differences were over; the incident had had its bright side—it had brought them together again.

Sarah was not at all surprised to find the Thorne's experiences. It seemed to her to be a trivial incident—everyone knew that arms were being smuggled into Lebanon and that Beirut was full of trouble-makers—but after all, the Thornes hadn't ended up in jail and nobody had been killed, so what was all the fuss about? She had finished her lunch and longed to bathe and lie down; to be on her own—to think. She was about to excuse herself to the grounds of weariness when Mr. and Mrs. Hanouche came into the room, which made it necessary to wait a little longer.

After having been introduced all around, the old couple sat down, a little apart from the others. Mr. Hanouche, who was very old and rather deaf, took out his amber beads and, holding them between his knee, passed each bead slowly between his fingers.

His wife was a tiny, bright-eyed little woman with a quantity of thick gray hair which she wore in a plait, hanging over her shoulder. She called for her hookah, offered it to the visitors, and when it was refused, smoked it herself.

"Nadea," she said, "is it true that Col. Raschid Ahmed has been murdered?"

All Sarah's weariness disappeared and she listened eagerly. Col. Raschid Ahmed . . . could this at last be the Syrian officer?

"Be careful, Mrs. Hanouche," cried Nadea, "or you'll have Sarah down on you like a ton of bricks for spreading false rumors."

"A rumor, is it?" said Mrs. Hanouche. "I thought it probably was, coming from Cairo Radio!" The Hanouches despised the Cairo news commentaries, but listened to them with appalled fascination, nevertheless. They had become used to, and even secretly enjoyed an atmosphere of crisis which Radio Cairo could always be counted on to provide.

"What did they say?" asked Sarah.

"They said that Col. Ahmed had been murdered in Beirut by Lebanese government agents. It came over the 11 o'clock news . . ."

"There!" cried Nadea triumphantly.

"How is it?" cried Sarah, "that Cairo Radio can broadcast this an hour before it happens?"

Mrs. Hanouche was the first to grasp the import of these words. She cried: "There's your fine hour for you, Nadea! Our poor country—poor Lebanon! These revealing wolves are tearing us to two. They come into our country and order our frontier, they send agents to spy upon us! We shall all be massacred by these criminal fanatics!"

"I don't expect it was the same man," said Nadea, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Mrs. Hanouche, said Sarah, "who is Col. Ahmed?"

"He is a Syrian army officer," cried the old lady, and went on to tell them no less vehemently, what she thought of the Syrian army.

"But what is his history?" Sarah broke in. "What has he done? Why would he be shot?"

"Why is anyone shot? Those assassins do not want reasons for shooting people. Murder is their business. I tell them that. Col. Raschid Ahmed," she shouted to her husband, who had sat throughout all this, staring at the carpet and caressing his beads.

Looked out of his reverie, he blinked his eyes, looked around at the circle of interested faces and cleared his throat. Like all Lebanese, he was keenly interested in politics, and although Col. Ahmed was not one of the most prominent figures in the Syrian political scene, he was the one to give them most of the facts known about him.

Sarah found it difficult to follow him, for he spoke in bad French frequently interspersed with Arabic. But she gathered that Col. Ahmed had once headed a political group in Damascus called The

People's Moderate Party, which had been opposed to the present Syrian leaders and had aroused a good deal of sympathy in Lebanon because of its policy toward that country of friendship, and live-and-let-live. He was not quite moderate as this moderate-clature might suggest—no one in Syria, according to Mr. Hanouche, could truthfully be called moderate—but he was less immoderate than others.

Then, three years ago, he had been arrested and thrown into jail, a charge of treason brought against him. But for some reason the whole thing had fizzled out—there were agitations—he had been puzzled with his fellow officers and men. It was said that the evidence had been forged and when some of the victims named in the letters were themselves arrested for plotting against the head of the Syrian Army, Col. Ahmed was released with a cleared name. But he disappeared from the political scene for a time and went to live in jail again, or worse, but of him until 12 months ago when his name cropped up in a Syrian-Lebanon crisis concerning the export of Syrian munition into Lebanon. The Syrians, trying to force the Lebanese into submission on another issue, had prohibited their normal exports into Lebanon and there had been a severe meat shortage in Beirut, which, although it had caused very little real hardship, exasperated everyone.

Col. Ahmed had been strongly against the policy of his own government in this affair and the Lebanese had made something of a hero out of him—which exasperated the Syrians. Everyone had expected him to end up in jail again, or worse, but the opposite had happened. His popularity had increased, his old army commission was restored to him; the meat crisis was over by now and quickly forgotten and the colored seemed to be getting on well with his own government, even to the extent of supporting it in some of its more extreme policies; but it was Mr. Hanouche's opinion that Col. Ahmed was simply adapting himself to a difficult situation, and playing a waiting game.

"But what was he doing in Beirut?" asked Sarah. "And why should he be shot?"

Mr. Hanouche shrugged his shoulders and passed on to the next beat. He could have been shot for 100 reasons—by political enemies, or by a vendetta—he belonged to an old family and almost certainly had traditional enemies of many centuries standing, quite apart from those he had made in his own lifetime. As for his visiting Beirut, he could have been spying, or negotiating with the government, or simply visiting his relatives—he had a Lebanese mother, and his elder brother, Tawfik, was settled in Beirut and conducted a prosperous business in the Avenue des Français. In any case, Sarah could read about him in yesterday's L'Orient where—if Mr. Hanouche remembered rightly—there had been a paragraph about his visit to Beirut.

An extraordinary feeling of elation and anticipation took hold of Sarah; she waited in suspense while Nadaa rummaged on the divans and pulled cushions about, looking for the paper. She felt as though she were on the brink of some stupendous discovery. And it was curious—both the feeling of grief and anger she had felt for the Syrian had gone—it was as though his death was over and finished with and something new was beginning.

At last the paper came, and there, on the middle page was a photograph—it was rather blotchy and dark and very unflattering, but there was no mistaking it. The Syrian was Col. Raschid Ahmed.

CHAPTER IV

It was 3 o'clock. Nadaa's three visitors had left for their hotel; Sarah, wearing one of Nadaa's housecoats (the maid was pressing her dress), was lying on Nadaa's bed, while Nadaa completed her packing. The blinds were drawn—it was cool and quiet in the room—every now and again the blind moved and a wedge of light appeared, white-hot, on the wall, reminding them of the blinding sunlight outside.

In this room, on the divan in the corner, Sarah had slept during her first weeks in Beirut. It was cluttered with heavy, ugly furniture, sentimental pictures, tasteless fashions. Sarah first looked on all this she had been astonished that Nadaa, who always dressed with impeccable taste, seemed not to realize how hideous it all was; but she looked around her now with a faint smile.

What a comfortable, friendly room it was; and in spite of its ugly knick-knacks—wonderfully peaceable, perhaps because it seemed so permanent.

If it came back in 20 years' time it would be just the same, thought Sarah; the old things would stay—though there would be more ornaments and more photographs on the wall, and there would already, hung on the wall alongside the dressing-table.

"I see you have a new boy friend," she remarked. Nadaa said nothing, but folded a blouse put it in the suitcase and shrugged her shoulders. She wished she had taken the photograph down before Sarah came into the room, for with Sarah there she felt ashamed of it, as though it were evidence of a secret.

"Poor Khil Hussein! You're more fickle than I am! At least I stuck to Marcel for six months. Why don't you get married and stop worshipping public men?"

"Why don't you get married yourself?" retorted Nadaa, looking up under low, scowling brows.

"I will—to the next one." "Will you waste your life chasing around worthless men like Marcel? There's something horribly servile about you, Sarah—you seem actually to enjoy shoving all your ability so that some man can have the satisfaction of showing you around."

"That's all I've talent for," said Sarah, smiling. She stretched her legs and was suddenly sharply aware of her own body, and the way it was wearing its energies. Nadaa's right, she thought—imprudently, wasteful of my affections; well, I've finished with the Marcehs of this world. Next time I meet an attractive man I shall bring a little intelligence to bear upon him—I shall wait and examine his suitability. But in the very moment of making this resolve her thoughts had drifted away from it, as though borne, involuntarily, by a perverse and romantic streak in her nature.

"And by the look on your face," said Nadaa, "I can see you've someone else in mind already. Well, Sarah, here you are Jordanian women struggling for some kind of status, and people like you . . ." She broke off, and ended expostulating violently: "Marriage! There's too much I want to do with my life to do so sincerely. She had no intention of marrying, although many men would have been glad to marry her. She was a patriot. She was not interested in men—only in heroes; she had never before met a man, only a humdrum, unheroic, unadored. Her first hero had been Glub Pasha, the English general and leader of the Arab Legion; then the young monarch of Jordan, King Hussein, had been her devotion. And now the picture of Gamel Abdul Nasser hung from her wall.

Yet Nadaa was ashamed of this new enthusiasm as she had not been of the others. It was an indulgence running counter to her intelligence; every time she listened to the broadcast speeches from Cairo her heart beat with anger and pride—as it was intended that it should—and her reason was submerged. In her clearheaded moments she knew that the claim of her new hero held her captive. Her brother had been killed, her friends and family had lost their land, her country had suffered humiliation and misery, and the Egyptian dictator asked her only to hate; not to contribute anything to think, to be just, to be constructive—only to hate.

"You don't understand," she cried. "You're not an Arab. He's given us Arabs something. He's made us proud."

"What do you mean—us Arabs? You Jordanians are Arabs—the Egyptians aren't. How did they get on this Arab bandwagon anyway? They're only making a hash out of your mistaking love for hate."

Nadaa was silent. Her position was hard to defend, for in her heart she despised the Egyptians as she despised the Lebanese. Neither, in her opinion, was true Arab. The Syrians could claim this supreme distinction, the Jordanians, naturally, were not—Arabs—but not the Lebanese, who were a soft, money-loving people; corrupted by a long association with the French; and the Egyptians were what they always been, a mixed lot—Negro, Berber, Somali, Ethiopian . . . with none of the Bedouin toughness, generosity and courage.

"Now if you and the Israelis would only get together, Sarah, yawning."

"We'll never get together. We'd rather die first!" "And in the meantime you play into the hands of any bandit who likes to shoot out, 'Down with them!' One of these days, Nadaa, one of your self-horror, with these Arab nationalists will go too far and destroy the lot of you."

"Perhaps we don't care," cried Nadaa excitedly. "If we go up in smoke you'll go with us. We shall

have had our day."

"Well—if all you want is to blow up the world—anybody can do that." "That's not the point! Suppose we are impossible . . . well, why don't you leave us alone to make our own mess?"

"During, don't you know the British are a dead duck? You're just kicking that poor old corpse around you don't even know you're being fattened up for someone else's stew."

"Well, the Americans then. They don't even understand us. They expect us to be grateful when they do things for us that suit themselves."

"All right—I admit everything. We're all in it possible, except you angelic Arabs, and don't delude yourself. You're just being involved in it. I only wish all your oil would dry up and you could cellar out and leave you to stew in your own juice." Suddenly Nadaa laughed. "Sarah—I'm so glad you're back! The last time I saw you, you had fastened the catches. 'Now while I'm gone, you won't make up with Marcel?'"

Sarah smiled at her lovingly. She put out her hand and their fingers touched, in a brief caress. "Nadaa, when I make up my mind, do I ever . . ."

"No, but you're such a fool about men. I only wish I could get you interested in my village work. Sarah, I could do you good."

"I don't believe in charity—your sort, I mean." "You say that—you don't mean it—you're just selfish and lazy." She leaned over and kissed Sarah's cheek, and then she turned forward to her table. "I told Alexia to get you suitcase from Dobbies—there's money in your bag—now I must rush. . ."

When Nadaa had gone Sarah felt suddenly very lonely. It was not that she was troubled by future—after all, Nadaa had left her with plenty of money and she was only going to Amman for four days. The feeling was more complicated than that. She had known before this restlessness and sense of loss which she had felt since the morning she had loved. Nothing seemed urgent or important. She lay, unable to sleep, although she was tired—for the sounds coming from the street outside distracted her, and she realized that she was listening to these sounds—the honking of horns, the jabber of a badly tuned wireless set, the cry of street vendors—and identifying them, as if they were the voice of men of them to contain some special message for her.

At length she got up and picked up the paper containing the Syrian's photograph. For the third time she looked at the picture of Col. Raschid Ahmed, who arrived in Beirut today, as the Syrian government delegate in the forthcoming negotiations for a revision of the trade agreement with Lebanon."

It was a bad photograph. It made him look thick-necked and square-jawed—when he had been so remarkably handsome. In spite of the pink car and the terrible tie. Like beautiful thoroughbred horse, thought Sarah, dressed up for a circus.

And then, suddenly, she began to feel drowsy, and putting the paper down on the bed beside her, turned over contentedly and went to sleep.

* * *

In the meantime, Beirut, almost without realizing what had happened, was in the midst of another crisis.

No one knew exactly what the crisis was about though it was clear that Syrian-Lebanese relations had become so strained that they were just at the point when it had seemed that they might be improving. The answer to it all—though as to what answer no one could agree—was to be found in the murder of Col. Raschid Ahmed, the murdered man Col. Ahmed was by now generally accepted—although strangely enough, there had been no mention of his assassination in the news broadcast from Beirut.

Radio Cairo, on the other hand, had hardly stopped talking about him since their 11 o'clock news that morning. They took the line that Col. Ahmed had been the victim of a plot to thwart Syrian efforts to live in peace and friendship with Lebanon. The disturbances in the Suez, the news commentator declared, were the angry protests of the loyal Lebanese people, who were stricken with grief at the news of this blow dealt at the great cause of Arab unity.

Supporters of the Lebanese government naturally took the opposite view that the Egyptians and the Syrians had conspired to murder Col. Ahmed, themselves with an excuse for a renewed campaign against Lebanon and that the trouble in the Suez had been caused by professional Syrian agitators

and discontented Palestinian refugees. But as the government itself was strangely silent regarding the incident, a good many people accepted Riasat Cairo's explanation, particularly after hearing it three or four times.

Everyone had forgotten the sequence in which events had happened, except those who particularly wanted to remember them.

To add to the confusion, the events of the morning were surrounded a whole harvest of rumors. It was said, for instance, that the murdered man was not Col. Raschid Ahmed at all, but a certain Yusuf Kastin of the Syrian military police who had fled to Lebanon for asylum. Another report had reached Beirut that Syrian spies disguised as tourists had been caught by the police at Sofar on the Damascus road. It was taken for granted that terrorism should be rampant in such habitual trouble spots as Tripoli and Tyre, but people were shocked to hear that in the quiet little Maronite village of Dhat Rhas a bomb had been exploded in a butcher's shop—killing, fortunately, only a cow.

Reports of violence and the expectation of more to come had their usual effect upon the mood of Beirut. There were many who looked upon the events of the day as providing a good excuse for an afternoon's outing. Sightsavers in large cars streamed into Rhas Beirut to see if anything else was afoot and to inspect the bullet marks on the pavement of Rue Zahle. The Corniche in front of the American university and on the cliffs above Pigeon Rock was crowded with people, on foot and cruising backwards and forwards in their cars, enjoying the sunshine and the spectacle of other people being stopped and searched by the police.

The swimming clubs were crowded as usual, and here nobody even thought about Syria or Col. Raschid. In the morning, paddling about in the choppy blue water, could look back to land and see their city spread out along the coast in all its happy richness. Behind it the mountains, purple, dim, and scarred with snow, stood guard.

★ ★ ★
Sarah slept for an hour. At 4.30 she awoke, dressed, and went out. She had no particular destination and walked idly and contentedly down the street, without noticing a pair of pale-faced men in the Hanouche's house, or the watchful, earnest face that stared at her over the wall.

The scene at first glance looked pretty much as usual. It was the flats opposite a fat man in a brown and white striped pyjama stood on his balcony eating loquats and spitting the shiny brown seeds on to the road. Young girls wearing cotton skirts that billowed out around their hips like inverted, full-petalled flowers, tripping off to the Corniche, swimming suits and rolled-up towels tucked under their arms. Every shop and flat, it seemed, had its wireless set going at full blast.

★ ★ ★
She came to Rue Zahle and looked up at it with a queer, irrational eagerness.

There was the pavement where they had stood in the morning sunshine; now the long, still shadow of the afternoon lay across it. There was the house that he had never entered—the high wall—the pomegranate trees with their waxy red flowers. "What was going to happen? Where was I? A friend and colleague, he had said. . . . The house was closed, the blue shutters fastened.

That morning, apart from the old man in the flat below and the children playing on the heap of rubble, there had been alone in the Rue Zahle—now cars, disregarding the one-way street sign, drove back and forth along it. One of the beggar children, dressed as guide to a group of youths who had come, presumably, to inspect the bloodstains.

Sarah came to the travel agency. The door was shut and there was a notice hanging inside saying: "Closed. Inquire No. 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24." No. 12 was an apartment building next door to the agency.

Sarah did not look again up Rue Zahle. One door had been closed, but there had been a great, unpleasant shock—as though someone had conferred bad news which, up-to-date, had been discounted. Instead, she looked at the large mounted photograph of a travel agent with a beard and the famous columns of Baalbek—the courtyard of the temple at Beit e Din—the source of Nahr Ibrahim, the Adonis river, at Akura in the mountains.

She had naturally been to the office at Beit e Din several times—these were two of the celebrated sights of Lebanon. She had also been, once, with Marcel one month ago, to the source of the Adonis; had climbed about among the fallen stones of Aphrodite's temple, and peered into the grotto

where pictures of the Virgin Mary now made claim for Christianity on the ancient holy places of the pagan goddess.

It had been early spring. Pale primroses and cyclamens with rosy-pink petals, and lowly scintillated like green snakes, grew in thick clusters from the rocks and nodded under the splash of the ice-cold torrents. Marcel, Sarah remembered, bored by the abundant scenery—nothing but rock and cloud and gushing waters.

Sarah had wanted to leave almost the moment they got there and had sat on a rock sulking while Sarah talked about with the guide.

He had shown her the source of the sacred river—not that she could possibly have failed to miss that while torrent gushing out from the gaping cliff. He had shown her the ruins of the Egyptian temple lying among the temple ruins and had ordered her to kneel by the grotto and pray to the lady of the place. He had pointed up to the cloud-draped cliffs and by means of a little stilted and mispronounced French let it be known that over a pass the old Roman road built by the Emperor Domitian had led pilgrims down to the other side of the mountain, where they had completed the rites of Aphrodite, another temple by a lake hidden in the hills overlooking at Ba'ka's.

That spring day—the old guide with his narrow, lined face, his scolding waters of the sacred river—came back to her vividly as she walked on away from the travel agency. She dwelt on it, trying to remember every detail of what had happened and what he meant said—for she had suddenly recalled that it had been on that day, at that spot, that she had first heard of Ain Housseine.

Ain Housseine. . . . Wondering what had impelled her to descend waters of the sacred river—dying breath, she turned the corner into Avenue Bliss and collided with two youths standing in the middle of the pavement. They made no attempt to get out of her way and she gave a gasp of shock.

So we're in for another crisis, she thought with surprise—and dodged past the young men into a bookshop.

There were a lot of people in the shop, but nobody seemed to be buying anything; there were all standing about talking in low, earnest voices. Sarah went across to the Middle East section and looked through the shelves for a guide book to Lebanon. She found one at length and opened it at the index.

More people entered the shop.

"Jews. . . Moslems. . . refugees. . . whispered about the shop like the first soft gusts of wind heralding a storm.

★ ★ ★
Sarah turned a page and began to read.

"It is not easy to get to Ain Housseine. The village is situated on the eastern flank of Mount Lebanon, in a landlocked valley, some 20 miles north-west of Baalbek. An unmade road, miserable by jeep, leads into the valley from the Bekaa."

"A more picturesque and romantic way, taking some five hours, is to walk over Emperor Domitian's road from Akara on the other side of Mount Lebanon, as did the Adonis pilgrims of 2,000 years ago. The devotees, after performing spring-time fertility rites at the Akra temple, crossed the mountain road and threw themselves into Lake Housseine for ceremonial purification."

"Miss Smith! Miss Smith!"

Sarah closed the book and turned. The short, fat man with curly black hair who was hurrying across the road towards her was Professor Adib—her former French teacher.

"Do you think there's going to be any trouble?" she asked him in French, backing behind a pile of books.

Professor Adib's eyes sparkled with excitement. His instinct was to predict the worst but his duty, as he saw it, to shield a lady from alarm. "No, I think not, mademoiselle. A strike tomorrow probably—she said with a quantity of inflammatory pamphlets distributed among the Sikes. But you need not be nervous. In Lebanon we look after our guests, man'sville, particularly. . . . a hand on his heart. 'We don't see change, so intestine.'"

"But Beirut," Sarah interrupted these platitudes with the first thing that came into her head. "There's a nasty atmosphere. Haven't you seen. . . ."

"As for Beirut—these agitators. . . . He dismissed them with a disdainful flick of his fingers, 'Syrians—Jordanians. . . . We Lebanese can look after ourselves. Now they are throwing the Lebanese out of Cairo—you wait and see—they can't live without us for a hundred years ahead of Egypt.' Yes, but there are more of them."

He lowered his voice and leaned closer to her. Sarah backed away. "Have you been to Egypt? I have. It is impoverished, bankrupt; the peasants half-dead, the administrators corrupt."

"They're raising a flag and fashions a cause," said Sarah, regarding him with distaste. "What cause have you got except trade and easy living?"

"A cause!" Professor Adib was contemptuous. "Flags go up and down all over the Middle East. A cause is born in the morning and dead at night. Do not distress yourself. This whole thing will fizzle out. The Egyptians are trying to whip up feeling over the murder of Colonel Raschid Ahmed—but you see. Our government has had long experience of these tactics. They are waiting and saying nothing, and when the time comes they will play their cards."

"What card?" said Sarah, and the time she did not mind leaning close to catch his reply.

He lowered his voice and cast a quick glance around him. "They will produce Colonel Ahmed," he whispered.

"But he's dead!"

Professor Adib smiled a benign, insinuating smile and half-closed his eyes. "Do you think so, mademoiselle? I think not."

"How do you know? What do you know?"

But his reply was disappointingly obtuse. "Forty years of living in Beirut, watching the wind blow this way and that."

★ ★ ★
It's just an idea, he has—he doesn't know anything, thought Sarah. But he had seen a hope in her mind that would not be satisfied. It sprang like a green shoot and dropped.

After Professor Adib had gone Sarah left the shop and stood for a moment on the pavement wondering what to do. Outside the gate of the American university students stood about talking excitedly and small-boys had abandoned their usual occupations of selling postcards and chewing gum to throw stones at passing cars. The scene was further enlivened by a traffic jam.

Sarah crossed the road, passed through the university gate and entered the quick shade of the garden. She used to walk here in the evenings when she had been living in Dhas Beirut, and made her way now to a seat that commanded a view down the terraced slope to the sea beyond.

There were few people about. Two stunted girls played tennis on the court below and students strolled along the paths between the lawns. Sarah was hardly conscious of them.

Sarah sat alone in the garden seat. Her mood had changed at the moment of entering the garden. She felt suddenly happy and looking about her at the bronze red pine needles scattered on the pathways and the eucalyptus branches hanging in hazy clusters, felt so much joy it was as though she had never seen such loveliness before.

The quiet sounded strange, as though a gap had suddenly opened out in the afternoon. Then in the intense silence she heard a footstep. She turned to look back over her shoulder.

A man stood directly behind her, looking at her with an expression of grave attention. She almost cried out, for it was as though she had seen a ghost.

He came a step nearer and nervously licked his lips. "I want to speak to you. You don't be afraid," he said in a low voice.

He was a short, rather stocky man, around fifty. But his nose, which was narrow and aquiline, and some remarkable eyes that had so startled her lent distinction to his face.

He gave a quick, apprehensive glance behind him and slipped into the seat at Sarah's side. She could not imagine what he wanted with her, and after that first, devastating flash of recognition, had realized that he was a stranger, but it did not occur to her to move away.

"Please understand," he said, speaking in a low, agitated voice, "I have absolutely nothing to do with this. I wouldn't be here at all if it weren't—well, we won't go to that. . . . But I don't want you to think you can make any demands on me. I'm a respectable citizen leading a respectable life, and all I'm interested in is keeping my family in reasonable comfort and security. This kind of thing is extremely dangerous and I don't want to undertake it with the greatest reluctance. Do you understand?"

Throughout this speech he had not once looked at her but addressed his words in a loud whisper to the clearing in the afternoon.

"I don't understand at all. . . ."

"I'm explaining to you that you must not assume you have an ally in me. I am neutral, mademoiselle." He should never have said this to me—she knew how I feel. I am a family man with children and

responsibilities. And being a Syrian, of course, I have to be careful. They think we are trouble makers, and they have good reason. I have to move with great caution, my reputation is precious to me. . . .

He broke off, for Sarah followed him to stare at him earnestly. "Please, don't look at me, mademoiselle! Look straight ahead!"

"Why? Is someone watching us?"
"How can I tell? You are known to the police. And to others. . . . You were with him. . . . I had to choose between a meeting like this and going openly to your house—which would have been even more incautious. . . . So I followed you here. As it is heaven knows, there may be unpleasant repercussions for me."

Sarah sat staring straight ahead into the oleanders as he had commanded. A bird with a curved bill tipped honey from the flowers. How small it was—how exquisite—its bill like a thin metal probe—its bright eye. . . . For a moment, looking at the bird, and tense with happiness, she forgot what they were talking about. "Who are you?" she murmured.

"That is irrelevant. . . . have I been talking for nothing?" he broke out angrily. "I've told you, I was forced into this against my will—even tricked you might say. . . . The whole point is, mademoiselle—who are you?"

"She could not resist turning again to look at him, 'Don't you know?'"

He, too, seemed to be losing his cautiousness for his eyes rested for a moment on her face. The expression in them was curious; he seemed almost afraid of her—and surprised and admiring, as though she were something rare and dangerous, but at the same time admirable. "You must tell me."

Sarah, staring into his eyes, felt a rush of emotion. They were so alike. . . . He must be an elder brother, she thought.

"Sarah Smith."

"And your address?"
"Five . . . Rue Jeanne d'Arc."

He nodded. "Can you prove this? An identity card, a passport?"

"No, I can't, you see I lost my passport this morning. There was . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know. It is difficult. I shall have to trust you." He seemed to relax slightly. He leaned back in the seat and crossed his legs, though he still did not look at her. "You probably think me overcautious, mademoiselle, and I don't mean to be ungracious, of course. When Raschid rang this morning I thought—you will excuse me if I confess what I thought but after all it was a natural supposition. . . . I did not question him then and I don't question you now, there is some explanation. But what would you have thought under the circumstances? He put it in such a way that I naturally supposed it to be a personal matter—to put it brutally, the—or—termination of a relationship. Consolation, at it were. I perfectly understood that he would want someone else to act for him—no scenes, no tears. Well, now—it was no more than an hour later when I heard of this distasteful attack that I realized I had been quite mistaken. But Raschid wanted me to be mistaken, that is the point—and this makes me angry. But I promised and I must keep my word or he'll never forgive me. There—there it is."

"But . . . he'll . . ."
"I don't want to know what you're doing. I don't want to know anything about it."

Sarah looked down at the bundle of money that he had put into her hands. She had never held so much money in her life before. While he had been speaking the tears had surged into her eyes; now they ran down her cheeks.

"But I can't take this," she sobbed. "I've done nothing!"

"I don't know anything about that," replied the man at her side, looking at her curiously, as though her distress interested and puzzled him.

"It was just 30 pounds—what I lost in my bag—and even if you count in the air ticket. . . . I did nothing at all. I just sat for an hour."

He did not move. He was silent. Sarah turned to look at him and found him staring at her with an expression of scorn and loathing. She was so startled the tears dried in her eyes.

"Ah! Mademoiselle," he said with bitter reproach. "When a man is helpless and can only trust in his friends. . . ."

"But he's dead!"
Their eyes met. Sarah's blue and imploring—his angry and hard. "So that is the line you are going to adopt," he said slowly. "I understand." Suddenly, he got up and without another word to her began to walk hurriedly away.

"What must I do?" she called after him.

He did not reply, but she knew he had heard her for he shook his head quickly back and forth, as though throwing her question, her plea, away from him. A moment later he had disappeared around a bend in the pathway.

She sat, staring down at the notes in her hand, and then taking her handbag, she opened it to put them inside.

Sarah had not until that moment actually examined the interior of the handbag that Colonel Ahmed had given her that morning. She had imagined it was empty—there had been no coin in opening it. The 100 Lebanese pounds that Nada had left her Nada herself had put into the bag, closing it again afterwards. So it was now—for the first time—that she saw the two letters.

The first was addressed to Mr. Emile Khalifeh. The second was to herself. She opened it and began to read.

As the afternoon drew on, the sun, sinking lower, struck full on the western face of Beirut. The city seemed to lose itself in this shower of light, and the mountains behind and the sea drew closer upon each other.

She sat possessed by a restlessness and impatience that was almost insupportable, left the university and calling a taxi told the driver to take her back to Rue Jeanne d'Arc.

At her home in the darkness felt, she sat waiting on the veranda amongst Nada's ferns and climbing plants. The check of it she thought. Telling his brother that he was buying me off. . . . I'll tell him what I think in my own time."

But the big gloomy clock in the hall struck seven, eight, nine, and he did not come. The long suspense, the clinging to a vain hope, had quite exhausted her. If it was any longer, she told herself, I shall go off my head. I must do something."

She did not in fact want help so much as to tell someone what had happened; to win from someone else confirmation of what she wanted to believe—of her strengthened mightily if only one other shares it.

If only Nada were here, she thought. But Nada was in Amman and most of Sarah's other acquaintances were in Beirut.

At 9 she left the house and turned down Rue Jeanne d'Arc in the direction of the travel agency.

CHAPTER V

ALAN CRAWFORD lived in a fourth-floor apartment next to the travel agency. The building was designed around an open courtyard that served as a place to hang washing and a dump for rubbish and which trapped and magnified the noise of wireless sets, parties and family disputes coming from the rooms around it.

Alan had become accustomed to the noise which in any case in Rhas Beirut was inescapable, and had grown attached to his neighbors. Moreover, he had a view which in Beirut is hard to come by, and the rate that buildings were shooting up, harder still to keep. By some happy chance his apartment was so situated that from his bedroom window he could look out north-eastwards through the narrow spaces between buildings and could actually see the mountains; and from his front balcony he could look across the roof over unfinished roof tops to a strip of blue sea.

When Sarah rang his doorbell at 9.30 that evening Alan was talking to his partner, Ismael Quazzaz. They had spent an afternoon, terrifying for Ismael and exasperating for the other—Ismael in jail, Alan trying to get him out—and were now discussing their experiences over a bottle of arrak.

It was the second time that Alan had prized Ismael out of the clutches of the Lebanese police. The first of these occasions had marked the beginning of, and put its stamp upon their friendship.

It was the second time that Alan had prized one way street not far from the French Suk, Ismael, disregarding the one-way sign, had turned his car up the street and, finding his progress blocked by a taxi which was coming down it, had been forced to stop. He was clearly in the wrong, but feeling himself unfairly treated he went to a motor taxicab driver (and one at that), had refused to back his car. The driver abused him in the foulest language; a crowd of onlookers collected. In the meantime a long line of traffic was piling up behind Alan. Alan's taxi it was, got out and tried to reason with Ismael.

Ismael liked Alan on sight and thanked him for his courteous behavior but by now nothing less than his honor was at stake. People shouted, horns honked.

Moderates pleaded with both parties and suggested a compromise. . . .

At this point the police arrived and joined in the argument. A brawl broke out and several people were hurt.

After a few hours in jail he was set free and, on discovering that it was Alan who had engineered his release, all but flung his arms, weeping, around his rescuer. The rescue of friends from the hands of a stranger, and one, moreover, who by nature of the fact that he had been occupying the offending taxi must have felt himself on the opposite side, seemed to be an extraordinary touching gesture. Alan and he were born one of those clashing, ill-fated attachments which come about, as often as not, from a mere chance circumstance, but are none the less fervent for that.

The outcome of this incident was that Alan resigned from his job in London (he had been on holiday) and joined Ismael in the travel agency.

The agency—now renamed Anglo-Lebanese Travels Ltd.—revived considerably. There were the usual difficulties of working in a country where one is not a national but when these were overcome business went ahead. By a stroke of luck they secured a government contract and in a rush of optimism recruited new staff. Up-to-date statistics of their business had come from airline bookings; now they started doing tours within Lebanon and between Beirut and Damascus. These were a great success—their discussion of the possibility of opening a London branch.

The two men made a good team. Alan had a flair for business; he put the accounts in order and built up a smoothly running organization, leaving Ismael and Ismael's sister Georges to deal with their clients, for whom, he quickly found, he had little liking.

The excursions within Lebanon had been his idea. He had planned them as lecture tours and had hoped that they would be both enjoyable and instructive. But they had proved quite intolerable. He had no patience with his hapless charges—derided by enthusiastic and more intelligent tourists. Finally Ismael replaced him as the A.L.T. guide, to the relief of all concerned. Everyone liked the young Jordanian; his pleasant appearance and friendly manner endeared him to all, and he had a certain tolerant attitude. Though inefficient, he was tirelessly helpful and customers, remembering his charm and forgiving his mistakes, usually returned. Ismael was in his element for he loved company, and Alan was happy behind the scenes working on his accounts, making new plans and keeping a watchful eye on his partner.

The two were not without their differences. Ismael, although he had spent six years in London, was an Arab and had his own way of doing things. There was something about Alan's methodical ways, even the neatness of his account books and the symmetrical arrangement of files upon his desk, that irked Ismael and aroused within him all manner of perverse desires. Alan made rules—Ismael broke them. If an opportunity presented itself to bribe a frontier guard, Ismael was the first to suggest it, to put something over the airways companies—even if it brought him no profit—he clutched it eagerly. He could not bear not to be almost in touch.

Alan, though, though he was tolerating his qualities, his good humor, his generosity, his childish openness of heart—was impatient with his faults and tended to brush aside his opinions as unworthy of notice. Ismael's devotion for his partner and his determination to clear himself of indebted to him was not and was not resentful of this debt for it was a source of intense happiness to him; but he also sensed a lessening of his own identity and was gradually feeling about him the same sense of reassessing it. He possessed a great deal of pride towards which the young Englishman was not always sufficiently tender. It was a pride, moreover, that he resolved some hard knocks over the years. For Ismael was a refugee and there hung over him at all times the refugee's bitter sense of humiliating deprivation.

When, in 1948, the Egyptian ruler exhorted its Arab subjects to Palestine to face the courage and stand the risk of being killed in a war that was about to be launched against the Jews, Ismael, his mother and sister, left their home in Jaffa and fled to Damascus. He had been a Jew-hater, but the war had rendered all the more bitter by the fact that his two elder brothers, sceptical of Egyptian promises to liberate their country and passionately attached to their lands, had stayed behind and prospered.

"You could have knocked me down with a feather Mr. Crowe. . . (Ismahel's feelings towards Alan would never bring him to the point of addressing his friend by his Christian name.) The nerve of that fellow! He didn't even bother to hide them properly. Guns galore . . . there under the seat left and right, a few old sacks, I couldn't believe my eyes."

Alan thrust his fingers into the mouth of the jar and clutched a handful of black ivory, shaking the jar. Then he began to slip them into his mouth. "It's your own fault Isky."

"I told you not to take on a Syrian. If one of our drivers is going to get into trouble, let him be. You're then his own people can deal with him." He bit an olive in two and let it lie on his tongue, stewing deliciously in a mouthful of arak. The agreeable sensation that filtered through his body was the result of this combined flavoured and tempered a little "Of course that's the end of the Damascus trips for the moment," he remarked more mildly.

"Now, Mr. Crowe!" cried Ismael. "I promised mother I'll be in Damascus next week-end." His mother lived in Damascus with relatives and Ismael always worked hard to keep the Syria-Berut trips booked so that he could spend a few days every month with her—for he was a devoted son. "You just jolly well can't trust anyone these days. Everyone seems to be breaking the law and murdering people and betraying their friends. It's perfectly awful. Sometimes I feel as if I'd just like to get away and start afresh. To London or . . . dear old London . . . or . . ."

"He broke off, look of utter dejection on his face."

It was a round, unlined, well-padded face. A happy frown, though when the features were in repose his dark eyes were surprisingly melancholy. Alan felt sorry for him.

"Cheer up Isky! It's all over! Here's to freedom!"

"Be your age!" said Alan kindly and patted his friend's wide shoulder.

It was at this point that the door-bell rang, and Ismael, whose imagination had been busy embroidering on the idea of the driver's perfidy, looked up with a little cry of terror.

"Alan went to the door and opened it to find a man standing on the threshold. Her large blue eyes looked up at him with their customary expression of truculent appeal. "May I come in?"

Sarah shook hands with Ismael but did not catch the name which was on the card. A blast of a wireless set from across the courtyard, she sat down on a couch facing the veranda. She felt rather light-headed with excitement—and hunger, for she had had nothing to eat since noon. And now that she was sitting down in this comfortable untidy room with its framed drawings and quantities of books, and tumbled cushions, she felt happy too—though she had achieved something.

She took it for granted that Alan would help her—after all he was English . . . and a man. And there was a reassuring firm and determined look about him, a quickness of movement and decisiveness of feature.

She came straight to the point. "Mr. Crowe . . . that man . . . this morning . . . Do you know that the Colonel Kasasbi is coming?"

He nodded. "I heard it over the Cairo news."

"I've just had a letter from him."

"But he's dead . . ."

The shade died out of her face and she stared at him dully. His words shocked her like a deliberate cruelty. The dead cannot communicate, yet Colonel Ahmed had sent a message to her, and she, too, had seemed to live again.

"I'm telling you what happened," she said coldly. "Will you read it please?"

She took the letter from her bag, handed it to him and sat watching his face while he began to read.

Colonel Ahmed had written to her in English.

"Dear lady," he said, "I am writing you to inform you that you are distressed for the need of money. I am too distressed for need of help and I turn to you in my need as my only friend."

"This morning, before we met, I had been trying to make a dash to find a train for whom I have important news of the gravest nature—but too late alas, I have discovered that this gentleman has left Beirut and is residing for the moment in his village. I am afraid, indeed I am certain, that there are many possibilities that I will not be

allowed to reach him. I have therefore written him a letter and I am earnestly beseeching you that you will deliver it to him at your earliest convenience before fanatics speak the word and these happy lands are washed with blood and tears. It will take you no more than three hours to reach this place which is called Chakra and which you will get to by going first to Baalbek. Yet in so doing watch for yourself and your safety for I should die of self-reproach if my harm should come to you while on this errand."

"As I write this I look up and see you sitting opposite me and all the words that you have spoken to me go through my mind. I know that you will not humiliate me by making arguments about the money that will be given to you. It is not payment, for there is no way of arriving at a price to which you could call. It is a gift in return. It is the only thing I can think of. You have told me that you love money and I know of no other thing to give you."

"Now as I write this the thought comes to me that although you say you love money much more than I do perhaps you do not understand yourself, and you would prefer to do this for me for nothing whilst throwing the money back into my face, when I but there to receive the insult. This is as may be. I cannot tell for I have not had sufficient time to study your mind."

"Yet as I am tormented by doubt, for you have told me that you have a great deal of pride which I do not think about because I am constantly thinking about my own pride, and this makes me examine myself with care and puts me into distress and confusion. So you must forgive me if I take the wrong turn and blunder. The important point is that I do not wish to be under an obligation to anyone, and I have a barrier if we meet again I would like it to be without a barrier and without debts on either side."

"And now, gracious lady, good-bye, and may Allah protect you."

"With respectful compliments,"

"Raschid Ahmed."

Alan read the letter through and put it down on the table from whence it was taken up again and read it a second time. He saw that in fact she did not even notice. She watched Alan, eager to catch every sign of the letter's effect upon him. It was as though something momentous hung in the balance, and though Alan were about to bribe in a matter of deadly import. And it was not just a question of whether or not she should do so. Colonel Ahmed had asked her this was of secondary importance, and she had long ago made up her mind about that.

Alan, though he did not fully understand the letter, had been angered by it.

"What's this money he's talking about?" he asked brusquely.

Sarah told him what had happened. She spoke in a derogatory fashion, for in this sordid political quarrel—bribing you to ruin his errands for him . . .

"What is this letter he wants you to deliver? Who is this Emile Khalife . . .?"

"The people I'm staying with say that someone of that name has an important position in the secret police. . . ."

"Someone of that name . . . You must know that Khalife is an old Lebanese family—there are Khalifes scattered all over Lebanon and Syria. You know a convenient profession for your Khalife . . . he's much more likely to be some Lebanese bank clerk than a Syrian. But you know where you are you'll be shot or gaoled for treason. This, what his name, Ahmed—you can see the sort of man he is—bribing you with a small fortune and then getting himself killed before you can refuse it."

Sarah's face grew tight and obstinate. "He wasn't bribing me. He didn't have any choice—there was no other way."

"You're not going to do this idiotic thing?"

"Of course I am. How can I refuse? Besides, I need this money—it's a godsend. You wouldn't want me to take the money and not deliver the letter would you? That's what my brother thought I was going to do. . . . He despised me—I don't blame him."

"You stood up and was pacing about. 'I'll give you the money,' he shouted at her rudely. 'Give that back. How much do you want?'"

But she felt absolutely committed—not by the subtle machinations of Colonel Ahmed, but by her own romantic nature. Colonel Ahmed's letter had filled her with pride and tenderness. He had called out to her, from the very grave—there was something miraculous in this. She had been so tight, she glowed—and this was happiness. It was unthinkable to extinguish happiness with cold doses of caution and common sense.

"I can't take you out of this. This is different—it's a debt. You read what he said. But if you'll help me . . . I've got to get to Chakra tomorrow. It's about 15 miles from Baalbek—I looked it up in the Guide Book. There's a Roman temple there . . . I expect people go quite often to look at that."

"I thought . . . if I went as a tourist, in one of your cars . . . so as not to look conspicuous, in case anyone saw me with my money."

"It's just possible someone might be watching me."

"I'm glad you can at least see the need for caution. Miss Smith," he leaned over her, "don't get mixed up in this! Don't you understand—a man's been murdered . . .? You were with him. Have you listened to the broadcasts from Cairo Radio today? Do you suppose these political manoeuvres are some kind of game?"

This as a matter of fact was more or less what Sarah did think, and with good reason for almost everyone else thought so, too. Squallid and bloody though the Middle East political scene might be, it was also richly fantastic; and for those with a turn of satiric humor, even comical. The world of "The Arabian Nights" where queens escaped death by story telling might have put on modern dress but clung to its accustomed ways. Even violence, by following antique patterns, was here not as shocking but as familiar.

"Mr. Crowe," it was now Ismael who spoke. "I think we ought to help Miss Smith. She's in a spot, you know. You're perfectly right in a way—I don't think she should go off on her own. It would be much better if one of us took her. . . ."

"Shut up, Ismael!"

"Please go on Mr. Ismael," cried Sarah.

"You're very kind. Will you take me to Chakra?"

"Why not, Mr. Crowe? I ought to take those people to Baalbek tomorrow. I could easily go on a bit farther."

"Do you want to be shot?"

"Don't listen to him, Miss Smith," cried Ismael. "I don't care two pence for those bullies! As for being scared of taking you to Chakra—well, you can count on me. This is my chance to help Mr. Crowe—you don't need to have anything to do with it."

"If you go to Chakra tomorrow, I'll report this whole conversation to Inspector Malouf and have you both arrested."

Sarah could only gape with dismay and Ismael cried. "Oh! No. Mr. Crowe—you couldn't do that. Miss Smith came to you for help—she trusted you—it would be absolutely rotten to give her away."

Alan knew he was being badly shaken. Shouting, losing his temper, insulting Ismael, but he felt desperately, illogically against this enterprise. He made an effort to control himself, sat down opposite Sarah and addressed her earnestly. "Miss Smith—Sarah—if there's nothing wrong with this man—if he's not asking you to do something dangerous and subversive, then there's no reason on earth why you shouldn't give those people the money."

"Inspector Malouf!" cried Sarah. "How do I know he's not just as dangerous? Did they catch the men in the taxi? They didn't even ask questions about them. That's the whole trouble here—unless you know who you can trust . . ."

"Why trust this Syrian?"

"She came back on the divan, shrinking a little into its cushions. My blood trusts him, she thought, my heart trusts him—but I can't tell Alan that. It's the one thing he wants not to hear. 'I trust my own judgment—we talked—I found out a lot about him.'"

"What's a Syrian doing in Lebanon getting himself shot at?"

"Please don't shout at me. I don't see why you dislike a man you don't even know. It's obvious what happened—the Syrians and the Egyptians are starting more trouble and they want something to set it off. They're both sides. I've known them always wanted Syria to be friendly with Lebanon and he's very popular with the army. They wanted him out of the way so they killed two birds with one stone. But he's not dead. He's still alive and got in first. I bet you, if we opened this letter . . ."

"Then why don't we? Let's put your improbable

theory to the test. Let's open this letter and see what it says."

"I couldn't do that. He'd think I didn't trust him."

"But he's dead!"

"How do you know?" said Sarah calmly. "I've spoken to two people this afternoon and both of them said he was alive. I hope he isn't dead. It's lucky he isn't dependent for his life upon your wishes."

"I'm only trying to make you see reason." She's mad, he thought. Another eccentric Englishwoman with illusions of grandeur. . . history was thick with them. Lady Hester Stanhope galloping about in turban and trousers—Gertrude Bell dodging Turkish officials all over Syria—Sarah Smith the girl who stopped the revolution. . . No wonder the Arabs are sick of us, he thought. It's time we stayed home. . .

"Mr. Crave," said Ishmael. "I think Miss Smith is absolutely right. I admire her sense of honor. Why can't she come with us tomorrow?"

"No Ishmael! No! No!"

Sarah got up abruptly. "Thank you Mr. Ishmael for your kindness. Good night Mr. Crave—please don't bother to see me out—you might endanger yourself."

This remark, in Alan's view, made it impossible for him to take her farther than the door. "I'm sorry," he spoke stiffly, for he felt ashamed. Not for having tried to dissuade her—he believed sincerely that he had been right in advising her to hand the letters over to the police—but for not having been honest in his reasons.

He had been thinking of her off and on (throughout the afternoon) when he was not worrying about Ishmael; that night, at the first sight of her he knew he had fallen in love. It was no light matter—no mere adolescent attraction. He wanted her and, not in any tentative, episodic sense; if there had been the slightest likelihood of her accepting him, he would have asked her to marry him on the spot. But everything had conspired to put him at a disadvantage. Colonel Ahmed was the trouble—dead though the man might be, Alan seemed constantly to be coming up against him as though he were a rival; and he had not come well out of the contest. The Syrian had given Sarah help—5,000 Lebanese pounds, more than 500 pounds sterling—and without her asking; but Alan had refused the small service that she did ask. The Syrian had been polite and tactful; Alan boorish and rude. The Syrian had been chivalrous, magnanimous; and Alan was left with the guilty feeling that he had not even been just.

But what annoyed him more than anything was the realization, after Sarah had gone, that she had come to him for assurance and that like a fool, unwittingly, he had given it to her. For no one in their senses is jealous of a dead man.

Sarah pressed the lift bell, but no lift came to her summons. She assumed it was out of order and descended the dim stairway, tracing carefully to avoid pieces of orange peel and melon rind that had slipped over from garbage tins.

She had reached the ground floor when she heard footsteps on the stairs behind her and the sound of someone calling her name brought her to a halt.

"Miss Smith! Miss Smith!" Ishmael, puffing with exertion, hurried across the foyer towards her. "Please wait. . ."

The bottom steps were lit by the street light—Ishmael did not come down them, but hung back in the shadow. His hands twisted one within the other nervously. "I'll take you, Miss Smith," he whispered. "You come along tomorrow at 9 o'clock. I'll take you."

"Oh can you? Won't Mr. Crave be there?"

"But he never goes on these trips—he can't bear tourists."

"He said once," Ishmael continued in an abstracted voice, "that if he had to listen to one more American saying it was all just like California, he'd shut up shop and go back to London."

But as Sarah smiled he became suddenly agitated. "Don't misunderstand me Miss Smith—I'm absolutely devoted to you. It's just that I don't want for Mr. Crave I don't know where I would be now—penitence and in jail at that—twice. . . Except it would only be once because I'd still be there from the first time. I could just repay him for what he's done, but you know, man wants to call his soul his own."

A car swept past. Ishmael stepped back. She saw his plump form recede into the gloom by the

lift. He seemed to hesitate—then turned and hurried up the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

EVERYONE conversant with romantic literature knows well that the mezzutin, that beautiful haunting call that rings throughout the Moolen East, rouses the sleeper from his morning coo. The occupants of the Hanoouche's house had little hope of defying this tradition for the mosque in an adjoining street was liberally fitted with loud-speakers, and the voice of its imam bawled relentlessly through their open windows.

Sarah lay for a moment, listening to this melodious, then got up and dressed. She found Mrs. Hanoouche in Nadea's sitting-room listening to the early morning news from Cairo, a spate of truculent Arabic Sarah could not liberally filter with loud-speakers, and the voice of it displeased Mrs. Hanoouche who scowled.

"The assassins!" cried little Mrs. Hanoouche, her coffee cup trembling violently in her hand. "The first! The first! Listen to their lies. Madam-madam Sarah! What is to become of us? Where can we go? What can we do? These murderers will cut our throats while we sleep in our beds. 40 years I have lived in this house. . . 40 years. . ."

Mrs. Hanoouche was turning over fashions looking for the morning paper. L'Orient. . .

"There is no morning paper," cried Mrs. Hanoouche. "They threw a bomb through the window last night. All the papers are on strike—the Suxs are closed."

What window a bomb had been thrown through and where Mrs. Hanoouche got this information from, Sarah could not find out—for the old lady was too excited to offer rational explanations—but it proved in part at least to be correct; there was no morning paper.

The strike, however, had not yet extended to Rhas Beirut and there was little to inform the casual observer what direction events were taking. Sarah, leaving for the travel agency a little before 9, stepped out into a brilliant morning.

She was not the first of the Baalbek party to arrive; two Frenchmen equipped with a quantity of cameras, tripods and photographic gadgets were already waiting by a large red car outside the agency office, and Nigel and Margaret Thorne—also with cameras—were approaching from the opposite direction.

"I thought you were leaving" Sarah said.

"We are. . . we've got seats on the Monday plane. As a matter of fact," Margaret confided, lowering her voice, "we were rather forced into this. Last night we rang up to see if Mr. Ishmael—that's the guide who's going with us—was still in jail. You remember yesterday we told you how he had been arrested because the police found guns in the back of the car. Well, he answered the telephone himself and persuaded us into this trip today. I wasn't very keen with everything so unsettled—although of course I want to see Baalbek—but Nigel didn't want to give him the idea that we hadn't any confidence in him after what had happened. These people are terribly sensitive."

This latter pronouncement embodied Margaret's new approach to the Middle East; she was not disliking any the less, but a new tenderness towards Nigel and herself had made her anxious to accept his views, which meant doing it justice. She set out

that morning fortified by a solemn vow to be tolerant and understanding.

"I wonder what's holding them up," said Sarah. "It's hot, isn't it? Let's get into the shade."

They drew into the shadow of the agency doorway and, as on the day before, Sarah, turning her back upon the street, looked at the photographs displayed in the window. Raising her eyes, she looked beyond into the shadowy interior of the office.

At the back of the room by the big office desk a man was standing, looking out at her.

Surprised, but not alarmed, Sarah stared back at him. He looked desolately sad, watchful—and frightened. Heavens! she thought suddenly—it's Ishmael!

Recovering from her astonishment, she smiled. Abruptly he moved forward, putting out a hand to open the door.

"Hello! Hello!" he cried. "Hello, Mrs. Thorne! So you found your way all right. We'll be off in a jiffy."

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Margaret. "But Mr. Ishmael, you are sure it's all right to be going to Baalbek? I mean, what about the crisis? Someone in the hotel was saying it's one of the spots where there's always trouble because of being near to Syria."

Ishmael laughed. "Far from being unhappy, he seemed excited and gay. 'Don't you worry, Mrs. Thorne, we'll look after you. That's our job. In any case nobody in this country to go to do anything to tourists at Baalbek.'"

Everyone moved over to the car. The Frenchmen and their photographic gear took up most of the back and the Thorne couple the centre seat. Sarah had just taken her place in front when the agency door opened a second time. This time Alan came out of it. In a rush he crossed the wide hall, his hands on the pavement, his hands on his hips, he regarded the party with an expression of bitter irony.

He showed no surprise on seeing Sarah and it occurred to her that he must have been watching them through the window as Ishmael had watched a moment before. She waited tensely, wondering what he intended to do. Surely he would not dare order her out of the car. She gazed at him with an expression at once defiant and supplicating.

"Perfectly right in her guess. . . Alan had been watching them for some moments from the office and had been wondering whether or not to interfere. When Ishmael hurried out the night before he had guessed that it was to make some arrangement with him about the trip to Chakra, and he had come into the office that morning through the back door in the certainty of seeing her. At the time he had only wanted to verify his guess—nothing more. But when he actually saw them together he became so angry he felt he hated her. She looked so fresh, so vivid, so unexpected. Her smile wounded him with its insolent happiness. She looked radiantly beautiful and this radiance at such a time seemed a point she had scored against him."

He turned angrily to Ishmael who, caught out in the open for the car and, scanning him into the front seat, sat tense and pale, gripping the wheel.

Abruptly Alan made up his mind to go with them. Beyond this resolution his intentions were vague—his motives also. Had he set out to thwart the wishes of this romantic Syrian, this figure which, even if he was so far outdone him? Or was he protecting an ignorant girl from her own folly? But there was no time to work out the purity of his impulses, even had he wished to do so, and as it happened he preferred not to go into these rather delicate questions. He simply told himself that somebody responsible ought to go along and keep an eye on things. He even indulged in the exasperated reflection that such responsibilities always seemed to fall to his lot. Why did he always have to chase around cleaning up Ishmael's messes? Why was it always he who had to be unattractively involved?

He strode over to the car and, thrusting his head through the window, spoke to Sarah. "So you're going on this wild goose chase?"

"Yes, I am."

Alan opened the door. "Move over, Ishmael, I'll drive."

(To be concluded next week.)

PART II

ARMS FOR ADONIS

by Charlotte Jay

In the first place, Sarah Smith shouldn't have got mixed up in what was strictly a Lebanese affair—everyone told her so. But she did. How she finally got to Al-Housseini and what happened there makes for an exciting climax to this Crime Club Detective novel.

COMING NEXT WEEK!